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Premonitory Urges

By

Jessica Crockett

Accepted in Partial Completion
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

Kathleen L. Kitto, Dean of the Graduate School

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Chair, Dr. Bruce Beasley

Dr. Oliver de la Paz

Dr. Laura Laffrado

MASTER'S THESIS

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Jessica Crockett
May 16th, 2014

Premonitory Urges

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of
Western Washington University

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Jessica Crockett
May 2014

Abstract

This haunted thesis, *Premonitory Urges*, attempts to move between dream, surrealism, reality, voice, vocalization, silence, and three generations of the armored and squished female handing down misrepresentation through text messages and wars. The narrator within this text is fluid, forgetting, honest, remembering, meticulous, and forgiving. The narrator haunts those that are still living and as a result, the work itself is a haunted but tethered dream all too close to home.

Acknowledgements

Without Laura Laffrado, I would not be the good feminist that I am. Without a family of armored women, I would not have much else to say. Without Anna Lenau, I might have missed what being loved felt like, which I would have been fine with (I think), but she was not worried about that. Without Katie Kenney, I would not have anything to laugh about. Without my brother Roman, I would not have anyone to protect. Without Elizabeth Gleesing and all of our cat-unicorns (or unicats), I would not have made it at all. Without Caitlin Morris and Jessica Lohafer, life, let's be honest, just wouldn't be all that great. Without my strong Oma and little Opa, I would forever feel lost and quiet. Without my sister Sabrina, I might be a much angrier person. Without my beautiful mother KittyKat, I would not be confident. Without Jason Flores, I would not know what finally being "seen" feels like. Without Ace Flores, Chaprika Crockett and Bella Dokes Flores, I just would not be a proud mother.

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Spinning: A Critical Preface

By Jessica Crockett

Memory isn't reliable. But what do I do about it? I think of the people in the photos as 'she' and not 'me' and let's face it, the reader can see. The reader can see and so the language has to be brought up to the picture. The picture carries all of the weight, so you need to distribute.

--Judith Kitchen at WWU Memoir Roundtable

Poems are about decisions. The only problem with the previous claim I so eagerly scribbled down and took as my own from Oliver de la Paz last week, is that poems are certainly about decisions until the decisions make themselves late at night when cutting pears, into prose and the prose is made into essay and then the essay has footnotes and the line between decision and genre becomes somewhat vacant. I thought I was going to write a book of poems, but that dream slipped and fell out of the absence (not to be confused with abuse) memoir shortly after its beginning; I made the poetic choice to let the function of essay motivate the center of my thesis and my interdisciplinary model became a scrapbook organization in order to make sense of absence and loss and the deliberate failures that text and artifacts can assert when time and space give them adjacent pause. After all, when women three generations along have undiagnosed Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, they just might have to scrapbook to get through it.

So perhaps the realized sentence is something along the lines of: poems are about decisions but once the poem is no longer a poem and has bled itself into a woven hybrid or crept up and underneath an essay for a winter to thaw, memoir is about decisions. Density of

the “tell” and the weight of a life cannot simply be explained to a reader, but rather, I aim to create an account that further asks a reader to think back on their fathers *and what has happened*, what was beautiful, and what questions do they have. The spectrum of disruptability that I have tried to create through fragmentation, photographs and genre-bending, perhaps mimics my communicatively-awkward Tourettes as the seemingly implicit form of verb-as-noun asks a reader in, to but sit a moment.

I fear that memories (as does Patricia Hampl) too might be about decisions, so like any good daughter would, I started to collect them in poems and triangles of layered and assuming essays; assuming the next essay would return the reader to the previous and that the poems could echo a color or scent, became an aggressive sort of project and yet, the voice was not an aggressive call. The voice was not writing from the bottom of a well, calling up, which quickly became problematic in terms of aggression. What was I to do with a temporally ambiguous scrapbook structure that yelled for attention and a voice that wanted to hide between the lines? Sure my sister laughed last Christmas when we spoke about the time that a dog chased me all the way down to the water, but what really overcame my flushed cheeks was the remembering of many things that have chased me and the fear that they might never be funny. I have a problem with memories not carrying humor and I believe this shows in my project, but more as a strength than weakness. As I drafted (early on) Sabrina, I covered her with pictures, captions, and black lines to avoid the lack of humor. Though what about the dog and the water made me collage her body overlapping the text? Perhaps I subconsciously began this project emulating the house in which I was raised. The

photographs became the “yeller” and the text became the “silent treatment.” And so, I had to face what had happened in a stripped form.

The motivation of a scrapbook photography memoir needed to be re-envisioned as to break the cycle of childhood if not only for the reader. I decided in the final drafting stages to let Sabrina be. I decided the layering of text with image was doing too much “hiding” of what attention was supposed to be focused on language and for the reader’s sake, I wanted them to take Sabrina because they could in a way they did not choose, but rather paused with. In the way that my Tourettes work, I view layers of time at once and my mind instantly begins mapping centuries of possible connections and yet, this project needed space and breath. Just because I remember life in images and movement does not mean this can be handed out as a direct translation. And so, my Tourettes of design retreated and I better focused on the importance of Tourettes in the lived moments of my life. Questioning myself as a person living with the disorder is much different than articulating the characters who questioned me.

In “The Poetics of Tourette Syndrome: Language, Neurobiology, and Poetry,” Ronald Schleifer borrows Roman Jakobson’s term, “poetic function” and extends “more generally—fascinations with the sounds and rhythms of language, with rhymes and repetitions, with its chants and interpersonal powers—haunt the terrible and involuntary utterances of Tourette Syndrome in its powerful connections between motor activity and phonic activity” (564). It was not until I was twelve years old that I was diagnosed with Tourettes Syndrome alongside an obsessive sensory control subset and told that the knotting movements and aggressive moaning and vowel sounds would take away my ability to write (not speak interestingly

enough) without obstruction. I attended water therapy each Saturday for nine years with the single rule: all involuntary sounds are to be made under the water. I have not been able to follow the dichotomy of vowels under the water from pleasantries above the water and am a writer of echo, celebratory obstruction, omission and the occlusions that translations of “baptism” can assert. And yet, this project is not about my fear of obstruction. This project is not about my battle but rather, my survival I suppose. I do not like to focus on what survival can do to shape a person, but instead represent what surviving looks like when you are twelve years old and have been self-aware of your parents’ unfittingness to parent since you were six years old.

I remember sitting at the oak table in my Oma’s kitchen when I was six years old because I had just been deemed tall enough to sit with the grown ones, and listening to her talk. Though, listening to her talk could be a decision that I choose to include or occlude from any genre entertaining a narrative. The fact that my mother tells me that she too was there that day at the table and that Oma said, “Mothers don’t remember the children that they don’t need,” seems suspicious from more vantage points than I can turn fast enough to catch. Was I six? Is that quote simply an echo that my mother has carried for the long haul—what she runs from? And yet, what I’m actually wondering about is whose decision the inclusion or exclusion (it does not appear in my thesis) is, or does the dialogue matter at all? And then, what does a photograph have any business doing if there isn’t dialogue? I have come to realize that where there is no substitute genre—voice—medium—form, I have chosen a photograph to rather do the telling through showing. Although a mess in drafts, I have chosen to let photographs stand alone as their own text, free of the “tendency to tic,” as such, “is

innate in Tourette's, the particular *form* of tics often has a personal or historical origin. Thus a name, a sound, a visual image, a gesture, perhaps seen years before and forgotten, may first be unconsciously echoes or imitated and then preserved in the stereotypic form of a tic" (566). In other words, I aimed to unburden the reader and rather not punish them for what has happened; memoir cannot be about punishment and hopefully does not have to rely on or be made up of triggers.

I have been mostly exercising revision based on cohesion, chronology and economy and I am still uncertain as to what type of economy grief allows; through this stripping and fattening on the basis of the economy of the line in a poem and paragraph in "other" forms, I have come to understand that the inclusion and exclusion and form are perhaps the obstruction of narrative that has projected my thesis as a meditation on memory and the violence or void that story(telling) can hold. The photo-memoir that I am composing then, a fragmented kind with linear qualities but mostly complications, may or may not prove the opening claim about decisions as Oliver de la Paz's or mine, depending on who you ask of course. It's a haunting thing, really. I would love to compose a translation or remembering in a straight-forward way, but unfortunately, that is just not going to happen (I don't see it in my future writing either) because my family is not in any way translatable. No matter how many emails and text messages my mother sends me, there are always larger gaps than confusion. The gaps or silence as is incest victim Phebe Bailey in her mother's journals, *The Memoirs of Abigail Abbot Bailey*, ignites omission to breed wonder—the non-horrified wonder of wanting her to have gotten out, enough that maybe she could have written her escape down. The ecstasy that can follow tragedy might be done with silence.

There is also something to be said about loss when a narrative cannot be continuous, but that sort of loss will perhaps be within my next project more specifically. Though, when considering “void” or temporal break in narrative or truth (as if truth belongs to one person or can be defined), I always return to Lawrence Sutin’s, *A Postcard Memoir*. Sutin continually returns to family stories that bounce and echo remnants of his childhood with his father, and accelerates these “before” moments with “now” moments of his own parenting fear. The reliability that Sutin gains from collecting postcards (memoir-ekphrastic prompts) that have nothing to do with his personal family history, serve him so well that memory is paired with cognitive dissonance and creates not a counter memory, but an extension—process—way to work through flash memoir. I have the memories that haunt me on the tip of my non-cuffed gloves every day, and yet, it is the photographs of myself as a child that I do not know. The photographs are vacant to me, and so I must use them as Sutin does, but in a way that can stand alone.

Perhaps it is this type of motivation—the non-realized-representative—that I had in mind as a prompt to my included poems. “Ashes” came from looking at diagrams of how moving boxes are made and “Portrait of a Tunnel” came from looking at an article on fishing. The point being, my poems came from visuals that had nothing to do with the poem except for the fact that something inside of the visual gave me pause. When I think of boxes I think of ashes and when I think of fishing I think of tunnels. When I think of ashes I think of my father and when I think of tunnels I think of my father. Perhaps any visual gets me to the father, but I think this type of landing on the same target might have room in hybrid forms of creative works no matter its repetition; Oma always said, “Burn the man and the man turns

up.” Sutin appears to be in reminiscence which I think I tried to part myself off and away from and though I worked alongside his open pages, my project insists on artifact vacancy; the ghost-story of what cannot truly be written but can appear from time to time.

I have found that pairing story with artifact has been the only process that keeps the chaos and confusion somewhat memorable within my dense project. I have realized that perhaps the photographs do not match up exactly, but they do serve a reader. The artifacts included within this project serve the reader with a task, a warning, and I think a version of suspending disbelief or slowly asking them to just wait. The artifacts within my project can be compared to a circus strongman and his weights in the ring—the weight is never real for the man but for the audience, is essential. Nonetheless, it always goes back to the photograph, and when this occurs, the conversation shifts and is about space and pause.

I have an obsession with stripping photographs of their color; somehow like Patricia Hampl in her essay *Memory and Imagination*, I feel that black and white photographs offer themselves up to be collected. Or perhaps my obsession stems from my Oma telling me that her parents “had it right the first time. Black and white photographs I mean.” Roland Barthes in his creative-theory book-length essay, *Camera Lucida*, discusses the terminology of “studium” (simply aesthetically pleasing) and “punctum” when it comes to viewing a photograph. He defines (with a passion for longevity) “punctum” as what grabs a person—holds them longer with a photograph—pricks them into looking for longer. I ordered my thesis in a similar fashion. I wrote each piece, no matter the genre, off of a photograph and I am keeping the essentials where a reader will need them. I am keeping photographs of the worst and of the handwritten; artifacts ask a reader to set their families aside, if only for a

moment. The artifacts also ask a reader to please not, just this one time, think of your father when I talk of my father though the text claims the opposite; even an imbalance here further carries the ghost stories moving like gasses within.

I have chosen only moments of personal “punctum” in that I am grabbed by my past and rattled a bit by the shoulders to please at some point deal with what has happened. *What has happened?* And yet, I do not want to deal with what has been done, said, touched, pushed, punched. I would much rather speak in footnotes, under photographs, around the moments that rattle me the hardest. I think there is much to be said about speaking around something, the shape that it leaves, like a coffee ring on a new table it has to be seen but the cup may or may not have mattered. If anything, I would like to at least convey a handprint in my project. After all, ashes do not collect in squares, and how can truth actually be reconstructed when there may not be an untainted version left?

As Hampl mentions, it is the black and white photographs that hold her a moment longer, ask to be collected, and stored someplace. I too would like to offer my reader a collection of something that can be stored somewhere and taken out in pieces without falling apart. My choosing to translate some pieces into poems while others remain in block prose all came down to content. How slowly should a story move? How slowly do I want a metaphor to fall—spill over? What parts of my history should not necessarily gather in a breathless block? That is how those decisions were made. I think that the hybridity of my project comes down to reader digestion and what can be considered a conflation of what needs to be seriously taken in and what needs to be brief, passing, and sometimes humorous. There is a light and a dark and the difference in length between chunks of genre I believe

allow the reader some leeway. (And frankly, prose is the love of my life, there's a finality of lyrics to its cube.)

When it comes to Anne Carson and *Nox* (after all, when does it not), I cannot shy away from the fact that I set out to create my own cavity—*Nox* box or nesting of some sort. I wanted a deep “thing” to place what’s happened to me into, deposit, and clasp with a twiggy or embellished close. I thought perhaps if I used erasure and occlusion and extreme obliqueness, I could just slide by undetected as that girl who is doing the “multimedia thing.” Unfortunately, this technique does not work and should not work because I am not nesting. Rather, the insistence of error became a main focus when I lastly added my mother’s direct response to questions that I lightly sent to her via email two months ago while she was in Mexico, and brought out many clarifications on how confusion is a living thing to the surface. The fact that she responded with the insistence of “I don’t remember” allows me to remain confident in the product but terrified in my actual life but nonetheless, I am seen.

Thankfully, *Nox* allows those two types of realities to coexist within her fragments and repetitions and occlusions. I wanted to create a difference in the way that I look at my mother, and certainly the way that readers would look at my mother. Choosing to place certain interview questions that my mother answered after small essays or poems asks a reader to be patient with a woman that was so heavily abused. I want my females—my pack—to finally have their agency. If misremembered memory can do this, I’m more than fine with that. I am resisting the norm and ignoring the cannon when it comes to fighting for the female agency. The only goal that I have in terms of avoidance within this project, is to

eliminate any space for stifling, even when my Oma tells me to be responsible for my emotions.

Though *Nox* was a drastic influence on my intention, I have become a different writer than when I began this project. Now I feel that N. Scott Momaday's *The Names* is causal for what I have accomplished. When I read the "Prologue" in N. Scott Momaday's *The Names: A Memoir*, I immediately got (over)excited with the two versions of the Kwuda "coming out" that were simply placed one under the other, offering the reader an experience with the storytelling and evolving storylines that were about to "come out." I thought this "Prologue" a brilliant inlet to the sewing of stories, of facts, of thoughts, abstractions, metaphors and the like to come, build and hold each other in a tense, straight line by the end (xi). Like Errol Morris discusses in his NPR Radio Lab talk, "The Facts of the Matter," and Lawrence Sutin also alludes to in an interview about his memoir, there is hardly a time when I will not see my mother or father when someone else talks about their mother and father. In *The Names*, I scribbled the margins with "oh, my mother too" or "absolutely my father too" and circled with passion when Momaday exclaimed, "In general my narrative is an autobiographical account. Specifically it is an act of the imagination" (x). I fell in love from the first page. (I'm sure this sounds dramatic, but this literally hardly ever happens for me.) It is not often that I get excited when thinking of my family, so this work pushed me through my project in a coddling way.

The Names' weaving through mediums of chants, stories, poems, couplets, dialects, dialogue, scenarios, memories and a blending of boundaries in these listed genres, embraces the movement of a storytelling—a history of mixed voices but at the same time, the most

important voices laying and entangling themselves on/with one another. This mix of mediums and moments of blankness or simple details such as, “Her spirit was whole and hard to bend, and she should certainly have dominated a weaker character—she found in her eldest son a temperament that she could own and manage precisely—but Mammedaty was his own man,” allows for character ghost activity (32). The simplicity of the details but not identities that we as readers need to read in memoir—need to read demonstrates that the weaving of mediums and the breathlessness of metaphysical matched with natural details of the world all syphoned down to the local level of a family are most necessary to the idea that memoir is a collection of something, not a direct translation of truth.

When Momaday details his family, it is from the outskirts, the “greats,” down to his very mother and father. He details his family successfully through photographs: the photographs placed in between the text obstructs the text, yes, physically, but add so much more depth and understanding of what this collection is, a spinning rather than occluded narrative and stories of humor and violence can in fact be bound together such as the drunk uncle “Jimmy” rhyme (40). The first two parts of this work offered me perspective, reflection, confidence, and of course fear when mortality came up again when Momaday writes, “It is when I am most conscious of being that wonder comes upon my blood, and I want to live forever, and it is no matter that I must die” (59). And yet, this talk of mortality is much more complex and not a moment sad. This type of mortality pairs well with the story of his mother having a shotgun held to her belly when he was in her womb. This type of mortality allowed me to open up about my own through the pressures of my family.

Momaday's type of memoir on mortality makes his mother's womb seem real and warm and his uncle's shotgun to her belly just as easily in my household when my father was drunk. I am in no way aligning my thesis, my parents, or my youth with Momaday, I am merely in awe of this zigzagging narrative that resists chaos not in story but in structure. Our stories are not the same, but I will continue reading this over and over until I am well done and old after my thesis. My project includes black and white photographs, occluded portions, erasure, letters, emails, artifacts and so on, but it is when Momaday writes, "And there were moments of peace and love, when my father held us in his arms," that I know how much I truly can learn from this text. The simplicity of the line stuns me silent and washes everything around me away, if only for the time being. Hardly has a memoir ever had such an effect on me. The convergence of history, story, the metaphorical and magical is absolutely necessary.

In the oddest way, I set out to compose a memoir of compassion and the tasks that love can take on and the tasks that overwhelm love. I did not mean to categorize my memoir accounts into the genre of violence or abuse memoir, and yet, it has happened anyway (I think). I have no resistance to this, I just want the redeeming portions of what can be considered "doing what was allowed at the time with what was available" to pierce through. This memoir is not a survivor's tale or only about war and domestic violence survival, but it certainly does show survivors and their crumbling post-war socializations. And yet, I'm still making my way through the day, no cliché here, no pity there, but the act of survival may or may not rely on the translation of what Patricia Hampl deems capable of memory, or as she states, "that is the myth anyway."

I hope to have displayed “turning” inward until my poems enacted translation. Although I think translation is like a trampoline, I desire the ability to celebrate both the error and mistake of being raised in a first-generation-fled-from-Nazi-Youth-Enlistment Christian-patriarchy household whose lesbian intent was the source of the Tourette’s *Syndrome*, and see what further translation this might lead to in terms of content, form, and genre uprooting. I wish to create an invasion of narrative as Carson does in *Nox* , but politely decline the assembling or mapping of meaning. I hope to contribute genre-bending and blending in various lush and haunting ways that enables a sense of place but also disorientation in that place.

Prologue

There's so many different types
of loss suggested
here
right here,
x _____
Did you sign it?

To the left seven notches,
under a pillow-talk demolition
voice and then here, do this:
turn its leaflet face to lace the next
under this building and the boom
and even a loss of celebration
in the ceremony of a skinned last line
look back, look back, (*I insist*) look back behind
and to the first line of factual
representation only to look only for a second
for a narrative
foundation that too can be pierced
through and fragile when held to the open light.

Green-Crockett

Kathryn Margaret Green and Dana Crockett were recently married in Valley View German Church.

The bride, a graduate of Rogers High School, is the daughter of Elisabetha and Jack Green of Tacoma. She is employed by Cascade West Sportswear.

The groom, a graduate of Curtis High School and Central Washington University, is the son of Betty and Eugene Crockett of Tacoma. He is employed by the Weyerhaeuser Co.

The couple resides in Puyallup.



Kathryn and Dana Crockett



Glossary of Useful Terms

Sensory Tourettes: *noun*

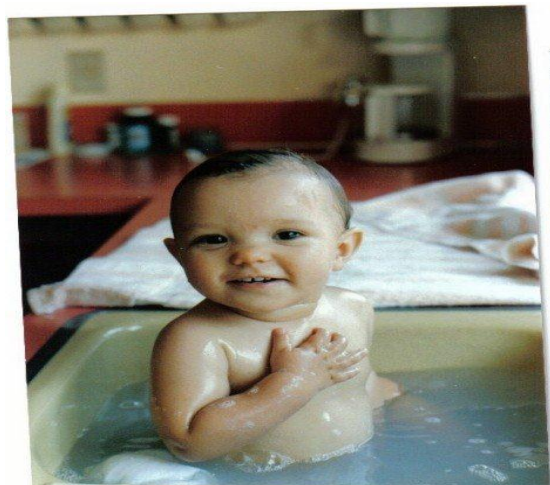
(1) The inability of feeling calm or that one's body belongs to itself. (2) The inability to interpret loud noises as anything other than violence. (3) The inability to place a spoon in the fork portion of the silverware drawer. (4) *I just can't stand the feeling of things tied or completely around the parts of me.*

Socks: *noun; punishment verb*

(1) Size 6-9 white, ladies Hanes cuff fit that makes a child with Tourettes want to amputate limbs even if the only technique is to pull the feet off; the cover over the foot is not favorable and can cause the medical discourse of the disorder to dissolve into the family seeing the child as a problem and personal discourse. (2) The action of having to wear socks for an extended period of time, being deprived of bare-feet privileges. (3) Sliding on the floor is prohibited when grounded for attempting bare feet on cheap linoleum. (4) If caught bare-footed, don't struggle and get angry, groundation will ensue no matter if there is a struggle. If angry and have Tourettes, twenty minutes in water therapy is necessary; screaming under water so that the anger does not stay alive in the air-world keeps a child balanced. The pool at the YMCA or German church is available 9am to 7pm on weekdays, Saturday and Sunday until 5pm. (5) Borax is required as a healing for *balancing* a stubborn daughter. To be dominated Paul will say, means that you have no choices.

Water therapy: *verb*

(1) The action of having to be balanced—baptized and held down there, under male hands to cleanse one of deception. (2) Try to keep the hands down.



Caroline: *verb; personification*

(1) The bird in the wall. (2) The action of longing at walls to feel a flutter of breath or wing or foot.

(3) Longing is prohibited in the presence of a step-father, but is necessary after he visits during the

nights, never found. (4) Presumed dead; timelessness. (5) The bird who fell into my wall from an

outside vent and did not sing to me, only cried, and then made me remember that I had a sister. (6)

The bird that fell into my wall, lived a week or so, but I heard her and cared for her the entire next

year. (7) I have never stopped imagining her chest caving. There's a certain resolution about keeping

something around, ignoring what rots.

Paul: *verb*

(1) Step-father. (2) Steroid user. (3) Professional bodybuilder. (4) King County Motorcycle Sheriff.

(5) Hispanic King County Motorcycle Sheriff hired to raise diversity rates in Renton, Washington. (6)

Heartbroken man. (7) Heartbroken and violent man. (8) Sad man. (9) Sandman. (10) "To be

dominated, Jessica, means you have no choices. Understand?" (11) Marine.

Glow Light: *noun*

(1) The only way to manage the violence. (2) Silent alarm. (3) An alarm clock that blinks for thirty

minutes without sound. (4) Studies show a glow light enhances the everyday person. (5) Silent.

Paul: *noun*

Brandon: *noun; verb when angry.*

(1) The nineteen year old Marine who has a truck and just wants to go to a movie sometime. (2) The

Marine that does not belong in this story, exactly, because you did in fact love him. (3) The

consensual Marine. (4) That moment when you realize you're trying to desperately escape your step-

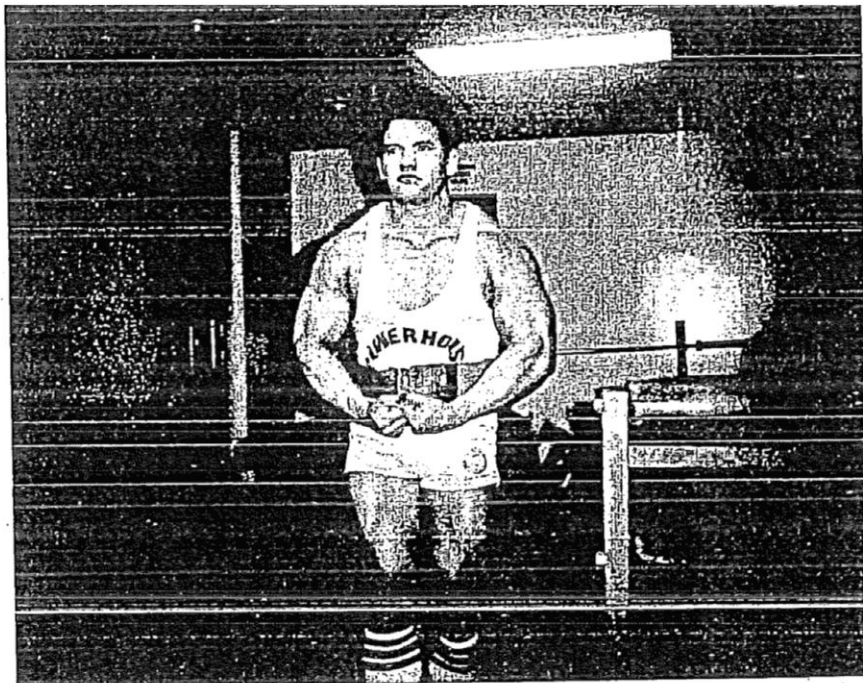
father who has fallen in love with you so you get into a truck and realize too late four years later that

you're dating exactly your step-father and then your step-father is the one that talks to you when the

boyfriend beats you up in your dorm at college. *Yeah, it's like that moment.* (5) That moment that does not belong in this story, but keeps on knockin'.

Liane: *noun*

(1) Suffered TB brain damage during WWII in a sanatorium. (2) Eight year old permanency. (3) Loves eating mayonnaise when the sun is out. (4) Loves being baptized every Sunday in The German Church because she cannot remember the previous week. (5) Wild child. (6) As a wild child, screamed "Baby, baby, baby!" at my stomach. (7) The dunce on days Oma feels challenged.



I. Age 13

The thrift-store Scooby-Doo Mystery Machine's anatomically-correct eye-tiny and plastic alarm headlights were glowing on, then off, and on in the way a child holds a flashlight to a tunnel-mouth before the focus shows something terrific and large. I clenched in my bed with flannel socks zip-tied to the ankles of my pants. Having Tourettes with a religious and blended family was not something that came easily for an undiagnosed thirteen-year-old. We were almost poor, the zip-ties were cheap, and the religion was a way to be cheap and strict without a second glance. Cuckoo clocks were deboned and machines around the house had to be "modified." Machines have to be "modified" in order to keep "that stubborn child's" mind-to-body embraced and balanced; Paul would tell his biological child, Paul Jr., with the bare-feet privileges about my differences in the echoing hall. "She's wild when noise or a zipper hits her. But shit, she will be a sock-wearing Guerrero if it's the only thing I do." *It wasn't*. I clenched in my bed with chaffed ankles and thought of hanging myself from the beam above. Although to hang would involve touching rope or string and my sensory aversion to texture—being touched by textures would take an even braver child.

I let the Gatsby tempo of lights press against me, awake but indulging. I let the seams of where the sock bulges across the toe-line press against me because all sharp objects had been removed from the house and there was no trying. I let the lights press against me longer, thinking of the strength-in-numbers smell the stiffness of drying motorcycle riding boot polish made as it rose like dough on a bathroom vent. My eyes lifted to pistachio slits and I thought of my mother's small voice when she used to gently love my father. She began speaking quieter after I ran at her with three-year-old teeth one night when she yelled at the television. The Mariners had lost and I knocked myself out at the temple against her knee. "She'll come around. Lobotomy just isn't as telling as it

used to be since women gained all those rights to talk back,” Dr. Nelsen joked at an under-the-table price while fitting me for ear tubes and a padded hat. The tubes would create a narrower entrance for sound so that I might find silence rather than riding boots on my bathroom floor. I would have to wear cotton balls in my ears to bed for the next decade to protect me from infections. “We might just have to learn from this clumsy one,” he thumbed toward me with a doughy chuckle. “She really does bruise like a pear around the waist and feet, keep an eye on that,” he told my mother as her eyes darted to the floor.

II. Age 14

I sat in my bed with flannel socks zip-tied to the ankles of my pants and let the sunrise of alarm pass through me, unmoving. Mother threw open my door, unplugged my alarm clock and stripped my pants. “If you’re late I’ll never hear the end of it.” Mother always told me about the lengths that a stepfather went through. She told me these things loudly, in the hall that morning and the morning before and then after so that Paul would hear the struggle in her voice. “Open your eyes. Just put your socks on today. Please, just put them on.”

I just couldn’t stand the feeling of things tied or completely around the parts of me. I did not own a single necklace, bracelet, hair-tie, ring, belt, zippered pant, and so on. I did not own a single item that could set me off. But each time Paul would lightly press into me I could feel the buckle where it used to close his belt and I, more than once, flew into a scratching fit often ending with sock groundation. Sock groundation was having to stay home for three consecutive weekends. Sock groundation was the most severe moment when I would realize that it might have been worth it—hot breath and all the buckles holding things in and not letting them breathe. Scratching was not lady-like, though, and so I let the lights linger me a bit longer there, under a loose blanket without my hands drawn or balled. I lingered in a swollen heat. I bit at the whitehot air, sending love-manic notes in molar gnash to the birds.

I told my mother before she slipped out, “There’s a dying bird in my wall. I can feel her. She must have come in through the drain holes and her name is Caroline. Caroline keeps me awake with small scratching and I think I’ll kill myself.”

“Oh Jessica my baby, please just get your socks. I do not have time for the Caroline’s of the world.”

Her name is Caroline because Opa wanted to name me Caroline and I think I wanted that too so I would have some story or belong to someone at the end of the day.



Standard. This is all just standard. My mother just kept on slipping.

III. Timeless

My mother had met Paul at the local Gold’s Gym (everything in Puyallup was local because non-locals did not exist so being far from the gym or the Jack-in-the-Box geographically wasn’t possible) only seven short months¹ after her divorce from my father. The gym was where she decided to start over. Yes, he had steroid veins but, “He has a child and a good job you know.” And that was it. They were married. His child, Paul Jr. never surfaced but one time behind our garage sale where he wanted to light off a firecracker and Paul shaped his arm so quickly the bone didn’t have time to adjust and splintered off.

“Being a sheriff has its perks and surprises and some good money now, Jessie-Bear,” my mother would say before bed the six times she did not work the night shift. The perks and the tolls sometimes were the same, like bringing German Shepherd puppies home, but when the puppies soiled, well, they never surfaced but maybe one or two times from the laundry room until they had soiled themselves so thick they should have learned that their fur was no different than the opal

¹ I have not heard any differently in terms of this timeline. So reader, go with this if you can.

carpets. “Puppies rarely survive, don’t worry about it, probably a weak batch,” Dr. Nelsen had told my mother on the phone.

When I was punished for walking on Paul’s left down the stairs because I needed to feel my toes curl around each edge of the left sides of things, he would force my toes to the right and if I could not be forced, well, then the alarm clock would be kept in their closet until the weekend. If I did not wake up I was punished. Caroline must have seen the lights more than I did after that. *Good times never seemed so good.*

When I was punished for walking on Paul’s left, his shadow hanging over me like the nights I held my eyes in a tight knit, I thought of Caroline’s sinking chest and my growing belly with fermented air and dust. What would company think about a wild child who couldn’t clean because she was throwing up dust all weekend? Would he zip-tie my mouth then too? Open my stomach and drop me into water therapy? Sew or tie that exhale up? *Good times never seemed so good.*

IV. Age 15

I held my breath in my bed with flannel socks zip-tied to the ankles of my pants and felt leg bruises surfacing. I let the headlights stay on as my body was exhausted, my hands stiff. My nights with Caroline had been drooping later and later after Paul would fly back, over the creaking floorboards to my mother. They drooped into dreams and still in the dreams there was the scratching. I could see the tunnel lights, but I preferred Caroline’s dying to her living inside my hallways.

I remember Caroline’s first breach of contact. Winds were at their highest on that driest week’s leaves. Leaves curled into miniature zip-tied coffins of themselves while the sparrow sat, tucked inside the drywall connecting my sister’s room with mine. My sister was mute for a year after Paul began laughing at things I wore or small jokes that I made, telling me how much of a “silly girl” that I was. She feared him so badly because he yelled when he spoke otherwise and kissed me on the lips during Christmas which made her cry when she thought I didn’t see her dragging the recycling bin full of wrapping paper to the curb; she fell back, like a ghost, and only moved through the halls

when she had to. She left. The last words I heard from her on a Wednesday morning were, “Jessie, I’m not feeling well today. Tell Mrs. Sperl I will not be in orchestra this afternoon and that I feel really bad about it.” He would check on her from time to time in the mornings in the bathroom. When dreaming, I sometimes would wake from light tapping and whisper for my sister to stop. Tapping, like a necklace on bone, felt strangling.

Caroline was drying out and her mother called down from the sill just outside my headboard toward her daughter’s weakening cries with every rise of reddened skyline for an entire week before my breasts began to swell. They were swelling like a rise, creating a tightening of shirts—line across my chest that made me feel strapped—trapped. This type of approaching death was the single most depressing and hopeless event because it was lingering in muffled breath and noise. Muffled noise was noise without reward. Her mother would cry as the flashing headlights of the silent alarm would try and render me back. I was not going back. I would live inside my dreams until my body wilted and my teeth would be kept in a small, shellacked box because no one could decide what to do with them, an odd quantity.

Caroline reminded me of all the times I had heard my Oma cry through the wall when her first husband died from tuberculosis and she took me in for a year until my mother “vanted me back.” She would cry with her second husband sleeping next to her already because, “Thad’s vhat you do during var Jesselah, you find and you keep and you don’t listen dhings falling beside you.” She took me in because my father had tried to kidnap me and run with me in a drunken thought. My mother stood in the doorway and he flattened her to the floor and her nose fell beside her; she was in a seven-hour medically induced coma for the pain, but as Oma says, “Don’t be stranger to das coma, sometime it the only vay to get peace.”

Multiple surgeries to build her a nose and I remember now, seeing her purple face. My father beat on my mother weekly, wasted their money on prostitutes and whiskey, and dropped me when I was a few months old that left a dent in the back of my head so that I have to sleep on my right side to

avoid feeling him. But I love or loved or just don't know this evil man. I carried pictures, in the pink folder that Oma gave me, of this man holding me. "Vell, Jesselah, men made mistakes because dhey miss dher modder's." My parents divorced, and I only saw my father on mandated visits; he was always drunk and flushed, pushing back his thick hair, smiling with an underbite, and pulling his sweater down because it had shrunk in the motel dryer. *I am now told, on the phone as I write, that I never saw my father again.*

I pressed my palms to the wall every hour in hope that I might be able to feel my Oma and her memory—feel Caroline moving and pressing back at me with one, tiny foot; even a wing to preserve my desire to crush her sounds and stomp her plush wings. There was nothing but her voice and its box wearing thin. I pressed against the wall, hoping my father would come to take me away. I punched the wall and did not make so much as an indent, and hoped that my father would feel the dent in the back of my head, would feel the cavity where my mother's nose that I had from her was, and would somehow know that I was not punching because I wanted to. *I don't know what the fuck is ever going on. Caroline. Caroline. Sweetness of Caroline. This is about Caroline. I am now told this is about Caroline.*

It was noon on a hot day when I decided to unhinge all of the vents in our aged, two story peach interior. *Just in case.* To stand atop the only stool in the house without slipping, I had to have bare balls on my feet and though I was on sock groundation for the next six months because of one too many offenses, I stacked the vents' mouths neatly by the fireplace downstairs. I imagined Caroline would just slip down and into my cradling and ever-so-ready pink palms. I was afraid I'd strangle her but I had to try. She might bruise like a pear but "delicate matters tend to," Dr. Nelsen always said. I held my glow light's headlights as a flashlight into each black vent. I called softly to her, my voice echoing up through the floor to where Paul cracked his eyes open, leaking blaze. I heard his heavy, flat feet balance the floor and begin forward. It was going to happen again, and then

later, for a finish. I stood in waiting, without socks and expectation. I pushed my toes harder into the cedar so that someone might better follow the residue.

V. Four Days Before my 16th Birthday

During the final two hours of Caroline, she was still without a hiccup of movement and I simply sat, rocking in my bed with zip-tied gloves, a hood, and socks, all of which joined at my stitched-at-the-stomach pajama suit. I was on probation. I had been kept home from school to “get over this defiance stage” as Paul told the school receptionist when she called, daily. Caroline was a tiny body stuffed inside an impossible situation and died somewhere between my mother’s tea kettle almost throwing me into a rage and the pumpkin spice bread she had rising on the bathroom vent. As the bread rose and the kettle rang on through my blood like a sawed whistle, I imagined Caroline’s three-ounce-chest caving like the babies my Oma sprinkled salt on during the war after they had been bulletted through on fleeing trains. Caroline must have blamed me just as Oma cried out to the babies in her sleep. I woke in a night-sweat and the bed was swollen with the condensation of thrashing dreams I was having about Caroline being strapped down and tested on to find the cure for Tourettes. I woke facing where she would have been in the wall, drew a heart and the word “fuck” at its middle, and told her that I would tell her mother what a lovely sight she was.

Caroline smelled until the cold chilled the house and the tea swirled around in heavy black licorice enough to smudge her decay further out into beam cracks. I still pressed on the wall where I imagined her to be, without frustrated limbs, there, in the shape of a sticker heart. Sweet Caroline, how you should have come back. Sweet Caroline, how you should have come back. *Sweet Caroline.../Look at the night/And it don’t seem so lonely/We fill it up with only two.*

VI. 16th Birthday

Setting my alarm at night was never something I wanted to do. Setting an alarm was making a commitment to go on the next day. After I would hear him roll out or off from mother through my cotton balls and helmet, he caught his breath and decompressed, “She’s such a struggle, that one, just

like her father.” But in the hallway when she leaned into my doorframe right before face-wash and last-call restroom time, her eyes were always on the verge of slipping down her cheeks because she didn’t have time to pause and mouth the words when a stepfather has become that man outside doorframes, waiting with a crooked neck all the better to ____ you with.

I’m not certain I was old enough to know what she wanted to say or if age had anything to do with it, but I felt something that was close, maybe. I felt her, quietly in violent cheek-biting. She knew his belt choice mainly on Tuesdays when she worked the extra-long night shift stocking at Nordstrom. She knew about it, but what could be done in a poor, postwar generation where food and clothes were the way to care. What *it* was seemed to have slipped just behind the tiny lights that took twenty minutes to brush me lightly awake and remind me that I’d have to wear socks that made me consider scratching myself through the wall—tunneling toward ear-sized bones. And the puppies, bless their hearts. He did give me puppies.

VII. Age 16

My sister did not speak to me, but she took care of me after Caroline had passed. She especially took to making sure that I was breathing, on my side; she could not tell as the dent in the back of my head always had me facing away from her. On the morning of my growing belly bump becoming hard and situated, I leveled the bare balls of my feet the best I could onto the heirloom—because my mother’s afterbirth engraved it with stain—cedar floor beside my bed, took deep breaths in and on each push out, shook my head a little as to shake fever out my pores. I webbed fingers into holes between other fingers and shook those too, slowly, in begging motion and then closed my back’s arch.

I held my joints in with breath and listened to the tub-water cut out and moved forward. I had been so used to Borax as a fizzling from God to heal my thrashing ways,² that I almost didn’t take her

² Oma now reasons the Borax was a poor person’s bath salts. I’m not sure if this has changed because she feels that God has ignored some of her prayers along the way. Her tuberculosis-disabled daughter, Liane, is not able to hold in her bowels any longer and Oma can only afford Borax. “Her brain from da TB coma is svizz cheese, know?”

hand and let her take my pants to the floor with the mint-crystal bath salts glittering down from her palms. I sat there, confused and disabled. Silent in my disabledness with wings turning in and in. And for the first time, my Tourettes was not the boss of my body and I cried over the irony. I had only been diagnosed by a neurologist once, quickly, oddly, he did not seem to believe in women needing medical attention other than counseling. I'm not sure how helpful men have been in the medical world, but I am sure that when he told my mother the "tics" would only worsen, she felt the fault on her shoulders and clamped her hands onto mine to try and cover their shake. My mother walked me to the bus, put me on the rubber steps, and told me that no man she knew had ever been right. But that's the problem. Whenever my mother sent me home, it was to a man. And whenever Oma took me in, from the bus or a trickling down of familial violence, it was with religion and odd chemical remedies.

I let tight lips fall into the slice of hot steam and my nose press hard on my knees on the frame of the clawfoot. I pushed fingertips in a fragile windmill when clutching the porcelain lip in pain to save from waking Paul. He'd noticed my swelling breasts and didn't know what to do with them as they suffocated through my shirts.

I became heavy and swollen in the tub. All I could see was rave-tones pinned under my eyelids, glitter-smoke in my ears and acid on teeth bubbling in cavities of metal and openness and tongue. I fumbled a body's wash and fumbled my body then out of the porcelain, onto the tile with my sister's ankles pawing to turn me on my spine, looking for a breath like a scientist with a twig and beetle. She briefly turned away so I could vomit in censorship. "I need Oma," I whispered. "I need a strong Oma." She cupped my stomach and made a small cooing sound as Caroline had before she stopped altogether.

VIII. November, Age 16

My sister and I always descended to the breakfast table in unison after baths, I to her left. She had dressed and braided me and brushed my sweat into a hairline. She brushed me into two blonde halves of a proper Christian and propped my hands into a clap in her dress lap and rubbed them in prayer that my heart was red and my eyes were blue and nothing more and nothing less.



The Black Turtleneck

Tuesday night was never a popular night, but I was turning nine and Oma had thumbled me a twelve-inch pumpkin pie; I was always at Oma's for cable, church, birthdays, dolls, using the bathroom, playing Yahtzee, playing with my mullet, and so on. Pumpkin pie, paste, seeds, color, guts, carving and the like are not for me, and yet, Oma makes me pumpkin pie every single year for my birthday. "Vor the Ogtobar girl." The spiced pie is low, thick, and always there with condensation- gloss atop the black-felt, rick-rack-ribbon tablecloth. At least the felt reminds me of my father. But my father is going to kill himself in a few years, so I'm not sure talking about dislikes is necessary here. Or maybe it is. I usually ask my mother if telling stories should be in perfect past or simple past tense. "Jessica, the story doesn't know about you. It won't know when you're published. You tell the story the best way that you can. Your Oma never remembers my stories in tenses, she remembers them in a zig zag."

Tradition is a silly term. Tradition to a German woman who has a collection of glitzy broaches and has kept her citizenship papers in the same Ziploc bag for years is best when left alone. Oma is famous in Lakewood, Washington at the German coffee shop for her five-layer cheesecake. I do not like any sort of topping or texture that can act as a sponge and also the leakiness of a sautéed mushroom; I do not eat the cakes and I certainly do not get out of having to reason why every time. "Vhy don't chu like your Oma's keg? Vhy don't chu like your Oma?" I'm often in this coffee shop which also has a candy/meat store to its left as you walk in, because my Oma wants to show my chestnut-large blue eyes to her immigrant friends. This is something that a mother may want to do from time to time, but it is what my Oma insists on doing every chance she can escape her home. "Jesselah, Kadie is vading ad de shop, lez hush up." I never say it above my ten-year-old shoes that I'm using the shoehorn to wedge that she makes me use from IKEA, but I always say under my heels, "Oma, it's hurry up."

When I was an infant, oh, say thirteen months or so, I am told that my father paid me the most attention, which is odd because my sister has never made this seem possible in terms of being in the world. When I was an infant, oh, say eighteen months or so, Oma fed me pumpkin puree to help soften and pass my stool. An empty pumpkin can on her counter and my father showing up at her house to come see me on his lunch was not abnormal, just a bit frightening as he was 6'5" but silent upon approach. He would startle Oma when she would walk into the kitchen to fetch a German cappuccino (old coffee grounds with water) and see him waiting at the table, having already set a place for himself and snacking on stale broichen. When I was having trouble passing stool as a child, my father started calling me pumpkin because it was all that came up when I spit; and he started wearing a constant attire of black to prepare for my spitting pumpkin guts up. I remember seeing felt in a store one day in the '90's when girl pop bands were at a steady five members, but I don't remember much more of velvet than that. But the velvet turtleneck is starting to come back to me on birthdays, in freight shops in Tacoma and Lakewood, and through stories that my Oma tells me but I'm too hungry to really hear.

Dana Lee Crockett: Crockett Dana Jessica

But father, you called me pumpkin from the downstairs hallway, an echo in a staccato house with frame of vulva-like corners.

You called me pumpkin because I reminded you of canned pumpkin, they stopped selling it by the puree during Thanksgiving off seasons because other than a hat on a head, it was only good for loosening a tightly wound pet's bowels.

You called me pumpkin and I imagined a pie filled with salt and orange food coloring; the inside of my thumbs were swollen from the salty tangerine eggplant the night before.

You called me pumpkin from under a story, always, a downstairs somewhere because you wanted to push me into a box on a top shelf so that I would never come down and admit I knew you and I were close enough to just be two bodies in a structure with places to echo, with places to share the unwanted because the unwanted could rise like steam and settle into transparency. I could see your face without needing your eyes, our nose, your oversized brows and ears without needing the walls to fall away and in my box I will stay, waiting. Waiting for the time when a pumpkin is just a pumpkin.



Pumpkin

*I was only three years old when my father attacked my mother in the middle of the night
when she attempted to block the front door from him leaving with me.*

Oma wrapped the powder-blue scarf under my chin, tight with a pinch, and handed me a tomato sandwich. She brought two pounds of tomatoes for the mosquito bites and then we ran out of money; even before the on-a-whim-trip we only had vegetables from the discount market, so they became sandwiches (and later fritters).

“When is mommy going to get better, Oma?” I remember her being sick and purple. I have imagined sick or diseased people as purple people since then and cannot shake the idea of bags under tired eyes as a pre-sign of restricted blood flow.

“She just needs a little rest. Her bones have always been so small, she’s tired.”

We stuck our toes near the largest jelly fish that I can remember and I remember being so very scared of the shock that my teacher had simulated back home from jellyfish. And I remember being okay with my mother being gone. I was young enough to just be afraid of jellyfish, after all, their tentacles are mostly under the surface when they sunbathe.

*When preparing for a trip, try and make sure your makeup is fixed, your skirt ironed, and
your socks unsoiled.*

I smudged into my Oma's living room and hung my body in front of her. She was watching Judge Judy and knitting with a *German Digest* on her lap under the yarn.

"Jesselah, what's happened? A fattening, know?" Oma stared at my bulb marking and did not move as she normally would around an inspection. "Jesselah, my beautiful baby what has das Lord done? A moving child and mute child³. Dhis mudst not go on." She took my drawstring pants and unraveled them to the floor to better look at the hardened part.

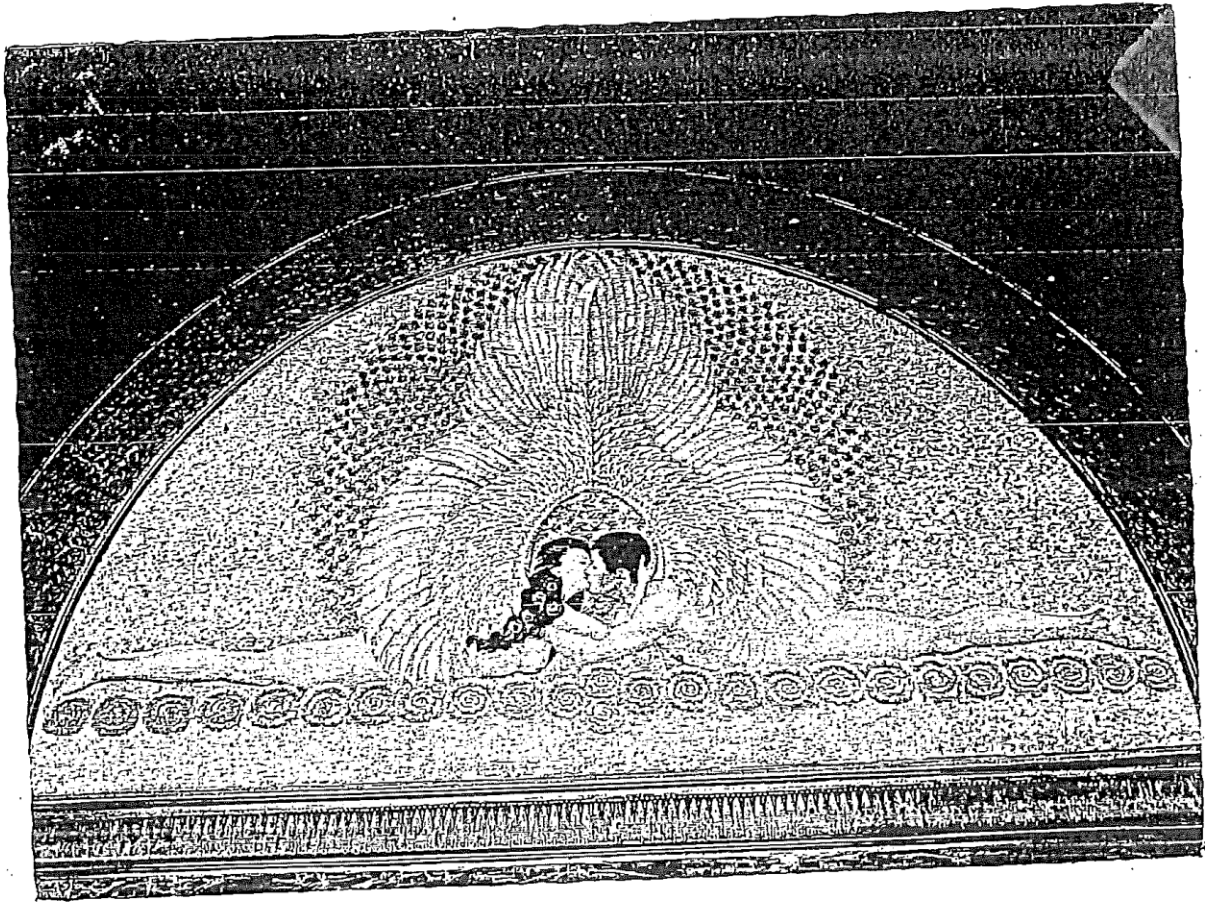
"Gadther shoes and pants, ve must make bus." Just as quickly as she had taken them down she commanded me to take my pants up. She commanded me to get myself out the door so that we could catch the next bus to the downtown clinic where people would not recognize her from the German coffee shop on the hill.

"I have to use the bathroom first," I mumbled and made my way toward the wallpapered moist room. I sat there in silence. I poured out all of the shampoos to give me time to think at the edge of the porcelain and what I was about to do. I watched the green Pert Plus stain the tub. I thought about Caroline as a tiny pumpkin, hard with a middle drying out. I thought about drowning and I thought about pumpkins. I had never wanted to take a bath more than in that moment. I had never wanted to be religious in any sort of way more than in that moment. But there were no Bibles, no Borax, no birds, and certainly no father to come and take me out of love, a high, or out of drunkenness. Oma had not removed all sharp

³ My Oma remembers Sabrina being mute. My mother does not. My Opa says she talked all day long, "Yap, yap, yap."

objects from her house like my mother had at home, but then again, she had told my mother when she was a child that if she were going to try and make it look like she was an unhappy child, to go ahead and just finish it already. My mother told me when I was five and she was crying, that she would never commit suicide because she had children. I looked around, held the blunt edge of a comb to my wrist. No match. The edge of a pumice body scraper. No match. And then I found the clippers. A match.

“Oud. Ve mudst go. Oud.” She knocked lightly but meant it, almost a small push of air from her knuckles to the door and I fake-flushed the toilet, slipped the scissors under my sleeve, and followed her to the garage door. “Quick, your shoes. Where your socks? You know in Germany during the var ve made Nazi dhere socks. You just veer das socks you made and you made das socks you are told. You just let dhem do vhat dhey need to you and be silent. Strength iz nod good during var. Nelsen will have socks for you, he’s good man.” The scissors fell out onto the garage floor. “If thad’s vhat you vand, who am I to stop you. Go head.” I picked the scissors up, set them atop Opa’s tool bench, and opened the front passenger door. “Shutzie, people vill see you.” I closed the front door. Opened the back, and lay down.



Postcard from Paul, sent
to me on my 25th Birthday

*Housekeeping Monthly*ⁱⁱ, 2001: For the Lover

*When in the house, please your man by covering your feet with socks; prepare yourself
fifteen minutes before his arrival.*

I sit on cooling thighs while the rash of an open-back nightgown and the slim metal tongue of a table leave a breeze, like a flesh, atop my spine. He asks me a few questions about my age.

“And what is the boyfriend’s name? He is nineteen, yes? And Jessica, tell me again, how long have you been sexually active? You’re barely in high school, are other girls at your high school sexually active?” Dr. Nelsen, my family’s doctor who delivered my sister, brother, and me, motions to the officer standing in the corner to come forth with his notepad. Oma stands in the other corner as I imagined she had when Germany finally took her street in Hungary and forced her to enlist or be treated as the rest. She stands stiff without locked knees.

“Are there other girls⁴?” he asks again. “Your Oma tells me that you had a bird. Do you like birds? Do your friends at school like birds? Are they excited for Christmas⁵?” He jostles a jar of cotton balls around but doesn’t lift the lid from the jar or extract any cotton balls. He nervously clinks the jar loud on the counter as he sets it back down.

“How about your life at home? Why don’t you tell me what that’s been like⁶. How are things with your step-father? Has he laid off the steroids yet? Your mother should really get her act together.” His voice seems to carry up into the vent next to a “Hang in There” poster of a cat in a tree. *Standard. This is all standard. Shame, shame, shame. What a fucking shame.*

⁴ Silence.

⁵ Silence.

⁶ You can imagine my reaction. No, seriously, you can. Do it. Go on and do it. I dare you.

“May I please take these bulging hospital socks off? I haven’t done anything wrong and I need the socks away.” I barely whisper this toward him but I want to say something before I start biting at things since blood is nothing new to me. I do not wait for an answer and admire my bare feet sticking straight out like small twigs emerging from a round tennis ball center.

“Why don’t you just tell me what you remember,” he says, picking up the socks. His fingernails are delicately trimmed and squared as he moves to paw the door closed. “Hi, I’m Betty from the lab” has entered and sets up shop. Dr. Nelsen has always been the man Oma has tried to set my mother up with. I worry that I embarrass her as I look with Betty for a vein. My Oma does not cry once in the room; neither she nor I know if it was my step-father or boyfriend that got me here, a complication of temporal reliance and extreme silence. *They both were so kind at first.*

“Well, I suppose it’s because of these stupid socks. He made me wear socks and I wouldn’t wear socks and now I’m here. He’s obsessed with socks. He might be obsessed with me. Let me try and see.” I look up and try to sort things.

It’s like that moment when the person you’re in therapy for picks you up from therapy in his car that always smells like gas.

Yeah, it’s like that.

You're Going to be the Best Nurse When You Grow Up

For my father, Dana.

The smoking nurse was sitting, a new pack's wrapper between her fingers and a rising steam indicative of tea with the light shadow of a string like a cable running down her paper cup between her knees. She saw my German nose and scarf-encircled hair and decided English was too far away from me. *Poor child's father just quit like that in a rented room.* And she lit up her lips again with edges of paper and ash—blew a ring at my back and I turned just in time to stick my tongue out and am not sure if I said, you're a broken tea bag, you know that? Like when the bag tears in the smallest way and the herbs don't come spilling out but just lay there like bottom feeding sharks. Surfacing when they want until there's enough small sediment that I realize it's a fucking broken tea bag, never going to steep. *Poor child, her father's never going to steep.*



An Exact Interview Between a Daughter and Her Traveling Mother

Christmas 2013

Dearest Jessica, my
sweet darling.

I am so sad you are so
sick and only wish I
could remedy that.

I treasure you. I feel
I failed at making you
know how treasured
you are. I fear the gifts
I gave were low self
esteem and romantic
relationship despair. When
you suffer I suffer. It
breaks my heart how hard
you are on yourself. Treat
yourself like the jewel you
are. There is no arrogance
there, it has nothing to do
with other people. You have

shined since day 1, everyone
can see it. I want you to see
it too.

You are that part of me
where talent awaits and
I am so relieved you don't
hide them, that you had the
encouragement you needed,
albeit from teachers and
perhaps not family.

I am so honored to love
and cherish you, to be a
part of your life, to witness
your light.

You are my treasure.

Merry Christmas

I love you.

mom

Jessica (Daughter): A memory or experience that you had with me that led you to suspect some sort of disorder.

Kathryn (Mother of Sorts): I never thought of you having a disorder. I know you had childhood tourettes syndrome and it was first mentioned to me by your 3rd⁷ grade teacher. You and I spoke about it⁸ and you were fine with it and that other people could deal with it. What disorder do you think you have?

⁷ 2nd grade counselor Mrs. Sperl.

⁸ ?

Urchins

Tourettes has become like another hand to me. Small but useful, she's finally able to carry, and be still when I need her to be still. It was not always this way.

Tourettes has become like another hand to me. Small but useful, she's finally able to carry, and be still when I need her to be still. It was not always this way. I'd hang over my sister's body during the night, tapping her headboard and wake bright-eyed in the morning in scraps of what was the night before and head down, toes curling at the edge of each stair, tapping the wall with my right hand seventeen times before making my way to the bus where I'd sit next to the driver, exactly nine steps from the clicking rotors. Oma told me that the jerks—knotting movements and aggressive moaning and vowel sounds would take away my ability to speak without obstruction: a German dunce. I attended water therapy each Saturday at Valley View Christian Fellowship or as all nineteen members called it, The German Church, for nine years with the single rule: all involuntary sounds are to be made under the water. The neurologist (a voice in the distance where science goes to what I assume, “work”) had suggested swimming lessons to help curve my rugged and jutting movements, that the motion might balance me and allow me to live a centered life. But that was lost on a family who cared nothing about medicine because there was no money in the budget for medicine.

And so it was in the small pool under the parting floor where children were baptized that I learned how to swim, or more realistically, learned how to bob. When under the water, I pushed sounds out so hard that I fell into visions of deserts and the small birds who looked like Carolines. Pastor Juergen would part the floor and watch me from the front pew where

he sat and prayed toward me. He would watch me slowly descend into the pool and I thought of all the souls that were lost in the water. I imagined the baptisms trapping souls and leaving the body more like a cavity when the child was brought back up. So, I just said “fuck” under my breath and drank water in, held it like a fish in a pelican’s gull, and spit it back out like a stone fountain of a naked child. If I had a soul, I was sure that saying “fuck” would not make God want to take mine.

The divide and conquer that happens when a stepfather has set his sights upon children not his own but his to smooth out, lights the race only realized a decade down the road when a boyfriend turns his key into his truck just like Paul had, cracking his knuckles before almost breaking the key in two.

My sister is reaching puberty and it’s annoying when she stretches out my boy-tees. My sister loves orange juice but claims: “never have I liked oranges.” I tell her to switch the “never” and “have” and put the “I” in front without moving my eyes up from the pages of acquired-taste and elder-crime-diva Jessica Fletcher, and giggle when the correction leaks out of me; I have just learned about sentences from Mrs. Winternight, my new Standard English speech therapist who helps me talk while gargling water to slow down an anxiety she tries over and over to find the root of and tug up. The last therapist cracked his knuckles and I bit him.

It is late, but not late enough to let his slipping in go, again⁹. It is late, but not late enough to let him slip “insert down arrow here” again. Permissions of giggles and sharing oranges within a sisterhood become less permeable after a stepfather isolates you from one another; removing bedroom and bathroom doors from their hinges terrorizes you because

⁹ See Brandon; noun or Paul; noun

doors *should* hold. I came home from school on a Tuesday and all of the doors were unhinged and leaned outside against the side of the house. It is a terrifying image to know that Paul unhinged the doors to let himself in. I plopped down on the family room couch, bit into an apple, and shrugged. Removing bedroom doors so that there is no opening, there is no turning to get in, there is just being there, is what nightlife became. Nightlife at fifteen having nothing to do with friends was and is complicated. Permissions between a sisterhood become less—keep getting weaker and weaker, a thinner membrane like translucent fish bellies, and you are bleeding out, letting your voice fall off to the side in a slump without bounce. You become scavengers for the other's slipping and stretching. Paul said he took the doors away because he didn't want me to get hurt sleepwalking. *I have sleepwalked all of my life, this is not what hurts me. But alas, who am I speaking to?*

"You don't need to always correct me, Jessica. I am the pretty German sister, you're the one in speech therapy but that doesn't mean you know anything. You are the one different. It's just different, okay. Squeezing out the middle of orange is different than eating at the skin. People always get so close to each other's skin and it's just disgusting."

"Jesus, who bit your skin today?" As I slip my *Airbud* bookmark at the mystery's middle, the woodpecker sounds inside the chimney. Sabrina looks over with wetting eyes.

"Hey, Lala, do you remember that bird you talked to in the wall? Man that was one horrible week. I wonder if she's still in there. If those walls had doors."

"Don't call me that, it sounds like a nursery rhyme."

"Do you even remember how awful you were in those nights?"

"Do I remember? Me? Yeah, when was that again?"

“Uh, never mind you. Just get me some orange juice in my to-go cup and don’t forget the lid, I need to change my pants, we are leaving in ten. I don’t know why you can’t find your own friends. I don’t want to be late again. You always make me miss the previews with your book in your face. I don’t even know why you come, it’s so awkward.”

“Face in a book or a bookworm. Either of those are acceptable.”

“You’re so annoying, you just think you know and remember everything ever since you started those baptisms. You know words, well great. How can you use them when you squawk, huh? You’re not even going to be real German anymore if you don’t speak like one. You’ll really be Paul’s favorite American daughter then, he likes you anyway¹⁰. Just don’t get those tics during the movie. Robbie is really important to me.”

“Don’t fucking say that. It’s not a baptism. Do you even know what a baptism is?”

“Do you? Are you awake right now! Jessica, just shut up. But Lala, I love you.”

Remember:

After I pulled each swollen leg into bed after the main Beyoncé song from the movie finally unstuck itself from my head, huffing my body to roll on its side, I couldn’t help but cover my ears with a thick, quilted pillow, wondering what death was really like when you’re unwantedly swollen above your drawstring and kept tucked without much room to swallow hard enough and feel settled. *Standard. This is all standard. Oh, Caroline, come back but a moment and sing to me.* At midnight I heard a faint spray of soprano; Caroline let her cry fade down while my sister took the reins performing a rendition of “Loch Lomond,” the final

¹⁰ Sabrina has been trying to apologize to me for mocking what was happening at night since this day. She texts me every week just to make sure we are still okay. *I don’t know. I don’t know. I don’t fucking know.*


song that I imagined would be on my funeral slideshow after they'd find me in the wall if I could ever get the courage to crawl to her. *Pssst, Caroline, you fucking braveheart.* I tried to stop myself but I screamed and I screamed hard, thrusting my pillow at the wall, "Sabrincha, Sabrincha, stop singing! I hate that song. Sabrincha, I hate that song." I could tell she was lying in the middle of her floor. She was always in the middle of the floor with her hair sprawled out like a Siren when trouble was close. I imagined that she was smiling shortly after crying. This was the best type of child I could think of, smiling out of burden.

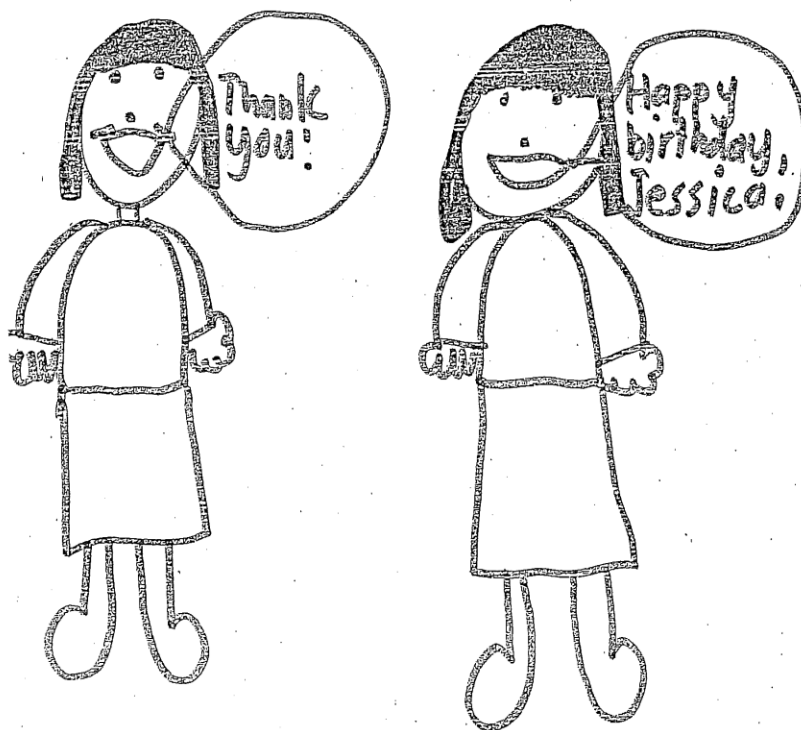
On the fifth night of "Loch Lomond" against the beat of a scratching foot, I fell to tears on the cold mahogany-around-the-edge floorboards and turned up to God for the first time out of context muttering, "Who will hold me down and under now, if I beg?" I decided then that Caroline was blue with a green hue under her wings and a touch of yellow atop her breast as I asked my sister on the other side of the wall, "Do you think she likes peanuts? Is she more of an almond bird? Sabrincha, come back to me."

Against all odds, it was her touch that made the mornings easier. Walking with fingers webbed into each other's sweaty pockets of flesh, tensed and crooked a little to the left, I felt as if crying was only for older women because my grandmother had drilled this idea into the generations beneath her. I thought about Caroline's casket, an open-faced ceremony with a touch of yellow gleamed atop her chest and I finally felt the reality of a vacant body.

Happy — birthday to you. 

Your chance has finally
come to be seven, I am
happy for you and I am
will be. You don't know
much love I have in my
heart for you. I hope
you love me back.

Happy birthday
love,
Sabrina  your favorite



The Way Back: *Emerald Ridge Current Events* Newspaper Clipping

In 1999 Sabrina Crockett and Jessica Crockett shared the same dream about a sea urchin.

Upon further questioning (of one of them to the other via walkie-talkies), it was found that neither of the sisters had slept the night they reported having the same dream. On the night of their reported dreaming, both sisters remember a bird named Caroline dying in the wall that conjoined their room; Sabrina complained of sleep being irrelevant. Jessica and Sabrina are one year, one month and four days apart in age. They both went on to attend Western Washington University and Sabrina hasn't gone back home since.

Remember:

I had barely made it with swollen little loaf feet to the breakfast table before all of the eggs were gone, again. Mother tucked the table an inch too far into my thick German puberty growing forward from my midriff and away from a thin-boned metabolism. I chewed my upper lip as she buttered¹¹ my toast and quietly, with pursed lips and an almost through-and-through bullet hole in the bread, said, “You’re welcome.” I knew the nights¹² were becoming

¹¹ My Tourettes are allergic to butter. It’s a real thing. Because I have Tourettes, I cannot have butter due to its texture that makes my tongue swirl hard in my mouth in zero pleasurable ways.

¹² I woke up—would wake up six—twelve—thirteen—seventeen years old and on the couch again. Mother was (always) in the other room reading tarot cards and waiting for the water to boil. Fresh oil made rings of suffocating pores around the caps of my knees; oils helped reduce the swelling. I rubbed it deeper into blotchy flesh and fanned out my fingernails to see how deep I had scratched the wall. She blew out the burner and mixed a package of grits with the water; the grain from grits like a pumice stone, shaved away heat rashes on my inner thighs. We didn’t have time to consider the “fattening”. Having a child sleepwalk with Tourettes I assume, was like watching something rabid not be able to see five feet in front of it. It just keeps walking and walking, foaming and foaming, and then if someone doesn’t put it down, well, you just pray that it stops. One night when my mother left the water boiling on the stove waiting for me to come sleeping down the stairs, she fell asleep and woke in the morning to me with bruises and Pedra, my parakeet, dead in her cage. The chemical smoke from the burning pot after the water had evaporated suffocated Pedra. The bird used to repeat, “Where’s Jessica? Where’s Jessica?” after having heard Paul ask where I was so many times before.

too hard for her. Since Paul had taken the doors, my body did anything that it could to try and slip out and away.

Sabrina had already finished three runny yolks over cresprie, was on her fourth, still with the thinnest calves in our family's bones, when she asked again for a door and a padlock. She truly believed I was walking in my sleep on purpose. The conversation was always the same: "Ach, Sabrincha, it's not safe. What if there was a fire and we couldn't wake you? What if Jesselah runs into your door all night and hurts herself more than bruises? It's best to keep her close to you with no door. Holes are what make people beautiful." This was usually around the time when I crossed my silverware atop my plate and tried to make myself smaller—bleed fully into the chair except for my eyes. I wanted to be a pair of eyes propped on an heirloom stained-red oak seat looking away from the fury-filled sister who I knew again, that night, I would stand over while she resented¹³ and exiled me from even a glance come the daylight.

Nights became terminal. Muscle Milk and Aveda oils weren't stopping the stretch marks from swelling—branding themselves like purple veins rooting out, onto the top of skin, from lacquering my knees and hinges. Eight visits to Dr. Accepts-Vouchers-for-Insurance-Nelsen were not paying off; thick thighs were still hollowing themselves¹⁴. Mother

¹³ I had nightmares about my Opa dying every few nights. He was alive, but Sabrina would cry after I would moan, "he's dead. The Opa is dead." She started phoning him more often after I'd stopped sleepwalking in 2002 without explanation.

¹⁴ Rotating hip cups and puberty pulling bones was a mixture that on all nights required a mother to massage oils into limbs that hinged, rub hot grits on calves and thighs, reduce swelling and save expenses on medical exfoliates. She would wrap my knees in vinegar towels with a tomato's fleshy lump at the center and consider the idea, after being worn down, of padlocking *my* door so that, "Your sister can have a decent night's sleep without you braiding her hair with open, crying eyes when you say Opa has died."

was always walking beside me as I slept; she called into her graveyard shift more than her boss favored. My bones were walking themselves out of order.

Sabrina rehinged her door on a Monday night, with a dresser at its back in place of a padlock. I was in the hospital by eight Tuesday morning until released with two stress fractures, a concave middle, and a family's shaved savings. It is a terrifying image to know that Paul unhinged the doors to let himself in, and when hinged again, I still ended with injuries. Mother had slept through the Bach Sabrina turned up to drown down my bones thumping her door, fumbling back, thumping her door, fumbling, thumping. The gas chambers played Bach before the bodies fell onto each other—held each other lightly in death; a warning shot. As we exited through the foggy automatic doors carrying bills and falling eyelids, I could see that my sister carried only resentment, almost flawlessly, in her skin. All became quiet and steady when Dr. Nelsen told my mother that my “troubles” were over since the last time that he last saw me with the officer in the corner with the notepad, that my belly like a boulder ready to break off did not withstand the fumbling. “She maybe had five weeks left. Well, she’s just a child anyway. Better off I say.”

~~Remember~~ Turn Back:

It was usually after being grounded for not taking my condition seriously enough, that Sabrina would consult her Bible, rehearsing her will to withstand her time on Earth to attain a higher Heaven. After the stress fractures, her body was limp to any reaction when I would call her name to play cards or cut shapes. She began to clutch her Bible more often than she would brush her hair, and her Bible was a children's with animation and pale drawings.

Go Back

I had barely made it to the breakfast table before all of the eggs were gone, again. Mother tucked the table an inch too far into my thick German puberty growing forward from my midriff and away from a thin-boned metabolism. I tried to reach for a spoon of potatoes when she laid her Bible on the table and her hand across its leather face and said, "All the tests God gives me are from his generosity, and so shall I overcome them in ways that serve me back." I could tell the nights were becoming too hard for her. I wondered if there would ever come a moment of simply childhood.

Fast Forward

It fell on a Saturday when I was twelve: Sabrina and I had shared an identical dream concerning a white sea urchin sucking on the darkest part of any ocean floor. Come Sunday morning on our way to church with Oma and Opa, we were able to pause our canyon-sized silence and sit together collaborating without making certain our knees and shoulders were the farthest they could be from one another. Although, we never did see its white body, but we agreed it was white when sitting on the humps of the jeep's backseat because there was a dead bee somewhere in the cracks of the seatbelt slits and Sunday-School was a full hour's ride. We gave the other two minutes to speak, each, against intervals of acapella "I Believe in Angels."

You Should Begin:

The way the urchin begged to be carried. The way it was scared. The way the plumped urchin tentacles were made of stone, made of petrified inches, made of sand dollar fetus hearts—shark-tooth shaped bones at its middle for structure and fertility. The way plumped tentacles told weak-ribbed vertebrates when asked that the ocean had yawned and drawn its course funneling back to birth. Had drawn lobe-finned fish and ray-finned females in, through gaping pores of unsettled ground where steel and hulls had torn sand tapestry. The bones, like raisins in the cartilaginous-pulped lobe, were constricting when I thought they should be constricting. I am watching myself breathe through slits in skin but with my mind above the water globe wondering if I'm watching myself breathe. The way the fin moved when I thought it moved because I thought it should. But I couldn't turn around, couldn't turn anything but my voice, stopping and starting and chopping it into cubes of ray-finned bodies like dice in my eyes. The way I saw the urchin between my eyes begging to be carried out, but with its mouth sucking on the ocean floor, I kept on without it.

Time

I Go:

When birds flock from a forested area to the highest their bodies can reach in the moments before sounds of heavy feet attempt to catch up to those moments was what bodies in the ocean were doing. All were prey. I was behind the moaning whales. Why are the whales still? I am told that they stop to exhale a sense of longevity in an ending dawn. All were being thrown into a magnet, into an epicenter's strainer that separates ocean and the death of a species. We tried to bend our dorsal vertebrae, bend, release, coil, bend, like inhaling propellers to rewind our doubt that the ocean was washing her children into the drain around her ankles. Sloshing mud-sand and lives under toes.

Time

You Go:

I am the fish that I've been watching closely to see if I am the fish that I've been watching closely.

Time

I Go:

I am the fish that I've been watching closely to see if I am the fish that I think I've been watching closely, for months.

Time

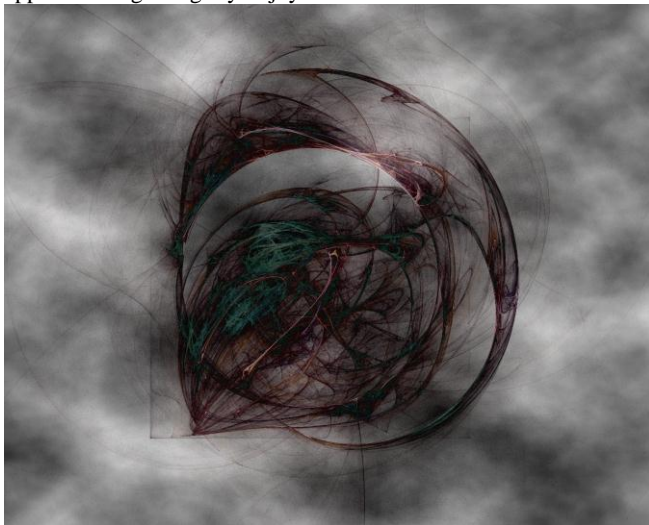
November 24th, 1999

Before entering the crimson and stained-glass doors¹⁵, we traded white and black gloves so that each of us had one of Heaven and one of what Oma called “Pole-hussy music” gloves. We slid into the front-most cool slab of mahogany and lasted twelve minutes before fidgeting with our sleeve ends, buttons, and neck lace petals. After clearing his throat to hush our rustling movements, Opa slid four mints and a napkin from his breast pocket into the space where the backs of our knees didn’t quite meet the wood.

We took turns composing the jagged-pseudopodia-footed urchin, and each time we slid the napkin between space and our blotched knees, it took up more and more napkin¹⁶ until entire whiteness was soaked in pen and melted in places with concave refinements. Oma pushed our hands under our thighs and gripped the cross that had been on her collarbone since the delivery room when she dangled it above my Vaseline eyelids.

The church was released back into the light of a day and the Jeep looked as if ripples of gasses were moving through its metal frame. I waited in the warm wind near the church cemetery and pulled at the tight Sunday-frilled socks that were cutting into my ankle bones

¹⁵ Sabrina usually prayed for the sleepwalking to cease—for a ghost rather than a fleshy keeper, but on this Sunday, she snapped her fingers lightly in joy.



while Oma counted the weekly offerings inside and marked down who wasn't offering enough¹⁷. After a heat rash burned itself into parallel anklets around my sock lips, memories of late night oils and grits overwhelmed restraint and I buried the socks just beyond the entrance gate to the cemetery. I knew Oma would notice the lack of socks¹⁸ since we were leaving from church for Ocean Shores, a four hour mobile trip¹⁹, but I was trying to put burning behind me.

On our way heading south, I marked the margins and edges of her leather-bound Bible with all that she and I had agreed upon; our initial conversation was like crawling out of a drought, but I wasn't going to settle for our fame resting on a purely oral history. Permissions of a sisterhood are not to be taken lightly. It was a constant and conscious battle to stay conscious between white-hot seatbelt buttons trying to press into hips, and composing a straight line in the Bible. The napkin molted onto the tan leather humps in the white hot heat and stained the dream into an even droopier version than the one I was trying to hammer into perpendicular memories. There was nothing I could do about the napkin, other than rely on its detail as I might with a map of anonymous mountains.

¹⁷ Lydia, Honolaurah, Sandy and Jack Savoy.

¹⁸ See sock groundation rule.

¹⁹ For Hours

Its point into cloth,
we agreed this time, again.
The urchin was white around the edges,
forced to watch Sea consume herself while its tentacles
remained stoned to sink in its own dome.

.
We shook with locked thumbs: split gold chunks
in half. We would become sisters,
become sisters who could sleep cities apart
and still have the same dreams.

It wasn't until our toes were in sand and clouds were dotted with birds intermittingly swooping down at sea trash and returning empty-handed that I was consumed with thirst—consumed with a sisterhood that would fall back onto the wheel of history trying to land its spoke on shades of what's happened. I wondered if the identity of the dream was wiping itself away between the ways she was serving herself back²⁰.

It Always Feels Like Yesterday:

I called to see if I could barbeque salmon on Sabrina's community grill. "It's the heart. Opa's heart." *Did she say knees? He's always had weak knees. He's my only good man left.* She met me at her car in the apartment lot holding a white laundry bag filled with white socks and schoolbooks and her journal titled "Poems for the Road"²¹.

She drove, and I babbled about dreams where hamsters mourned every September for their fathers, until my chin was low enough into my neck that my lungs cut off all sound and the physical world. I awoke squawking.

"Lala, if Opa dies tonight..."

"If Opa dies tonight, fucking forget it."

I woke up with hands still clasped where the urchin had been. I asked where we were.

"Seventy miles to go."

²⁰ She learned how to become fluent and flawless in the playing the "eldest gets all the baby pictures and ____, ____, ____, and the last word" card.

²¹ Since composing the initial dream, Sabrina became a poet on ancestry and nature. She only wrote about the physical world as it was the one she could measure and understand. Since composing the initial dream, I became a poet. I unfolded a poem from my pocket and handed her the fifty dollar bill at its middle. "We need to get gas and his kilt before the Veteran's Hospital. He wants to be buried in his kilt and our poems." It took three hours to reach the kilt and twenty minutes to find a needle to pin my poem on a pleated spot. When I ran my fingers through each pleat in the car, making sure it was as creased as needed I saw that my poem's ink had spilled down the page.

“What color²² was that urchin? Sabrincha, I am afraid of seeing Opa in the hospital and squawking.”

“Oh, Lala, the Bible says some people are protectors. He will still protect you even as an angel.”

“The Bible says a lot of things.”

Time²³

Remember the Picture Oma Took at the Beach?

It deteriorated beyond a fair copy. Our white moment in time sits atop the armoire in the “white” living room where white swivel chairs are in a social square but are not to be swiveled in. Where crystal candy-boats have never been for children fingers but suggest candy-boats are for children fingers when monthly brunches hold antique bee-hive grandmothers’ cigarette ash falling from their lips because ash can be steamed out of German rugs. Their rose-crème lipstick rings seep into their butts as they chat through exhales, eyeing the reds and yellows through the crystal and pointing at the frame asking, “How are those grandchildren of yours, Lisa?”

It’s glued onto a cardboard bodice with an overall five inch reflection, sealed with a slinky black leg in the back’s brackets that hold its face toward the dining room’s coffin-edged table where I sit second from the left for birthdays and holiday eves because she sits first on the left, closest to Oma as favorite children are first born and seconds fumble their hearts toward Opas enough that when I call it’s always, “Jack, your favorite granddaughter

²² I needed the urchin to be white. I couldn’t go through death without the urchin having been white. There is a loneliness in knowing that death can happen in a hospital bed or during small-talk on the way to pick up a kilt.

²³ Perhaps a drought cannot be cured when one sister gives back to herself by draining it.

on the phone,” as if I should be ashamed I didn’t compete for her inevitable second-best love²⁴ that she and I were both ashamed of.

²⁴ 5x5 Stained-Red Frame

I.

Its two olive faces shaped into hearts.
German scarves tied under chin,
slanted across forehead and cheeks,
make the year between us seem vacant.
Its two olive faces sit glossy, behind a plate,
behind a plate of spotless, aged glass,
feeding on sunlight through white curtains
to illuminate an ocean behind two purple and
two pink boots.

II.

And yet I never said a thing
until I had left my shovel behind my knees to prepare the moat.
Opa hands glossing thumbs across my cheeks;
“Here Jessie, have this other thing.”

III.

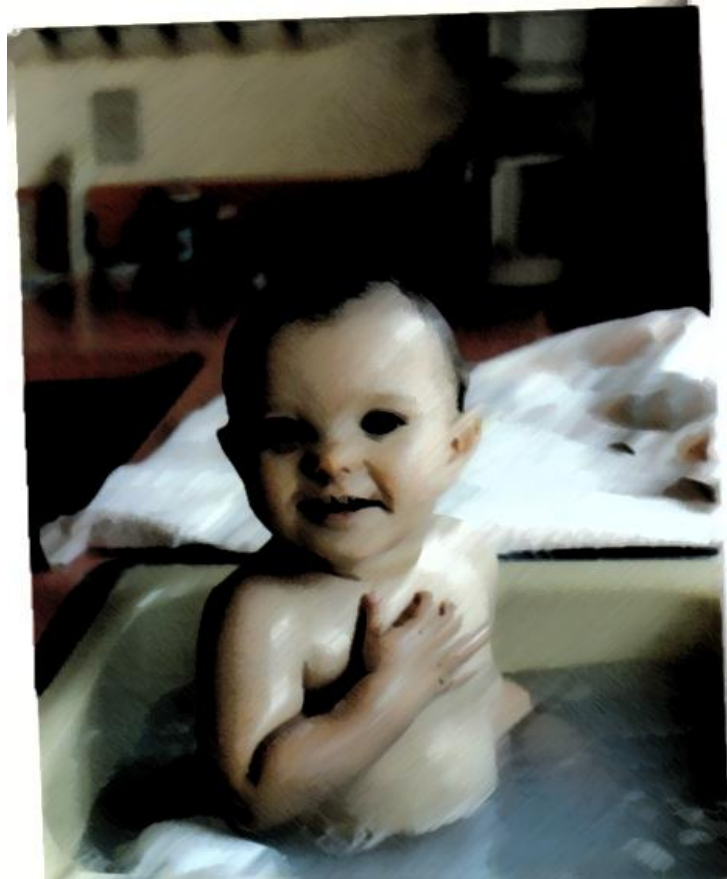
Shadowed sand indicates further out,
beyond the shot,
there should be wind coming off of an afternoon ocean,
pulling at the scarves’ double knots
while cheeks of one shrug under amused eyes,
cheeks of other ill with inhale before an elongated moan,
swollen with blonde eyebrows bruised
with tight, pink outline and curdling, stretched lips.

IV.

But I hadn’t wanted scarves to push my goiter any further
into my lungs,
I hadn’t wanted to wear purple boots she outgrew
apparently on the way home from church.
And yet, I never said a thing.

Appendix A:

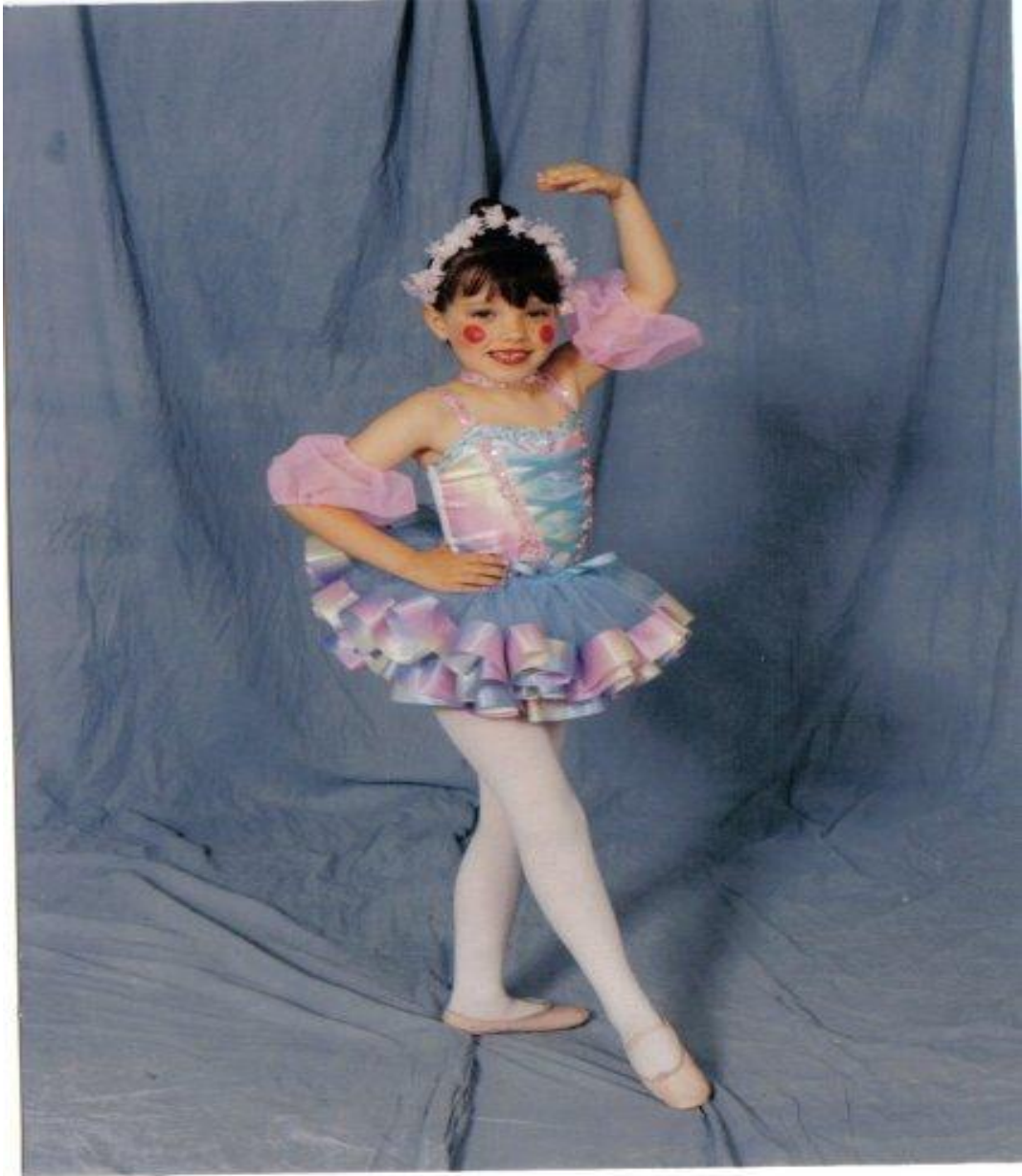
We recycled our bellies into each other's sink water and shared the same wall



until sleepwalking uprooted our politeness.

Appendix B:

You were going to perform in the Seattle Nutcracker until your days dozed into



nights and your nights were only a matter of waiting for me to come into your room and hang
over your body.

A Small Dislocation

I.

Mother holds tarot
in the back
where the white flags bob
like ice cubes bob.
Watches them dry
in angles
each angle
a small shadow of man's
shoulder,
foot,
footstep
echoes deep breath
up the nerves of her electric hands.

Mother holds tarot cards
in the slips
of her dewy finger webs
where the white flags bob,
clipped to the laundry
thread with amethyst inlay pins;
birthstone of her youth
a tight bulb behind tongue
in deep staccato exhale.

Mother slips tarot
cards into a fold
one more fold
there,
behind her teeth
dissolving the swords and cups;
tunnel tube to the echo
of plasmas membrane.

Mother holds the spread
in, Hanged Man
looks up,
gains balance from the back
a cupped stasis with bulged
skin where spine-fused posture
slumps,
to the right
in a hang
and it is time.

Mother tells me to go,
grow my own bones
in the night.

II.

Mother holds sage in
twisted knot
between webbed middle
toes,
smoke rising
encircles her low
womb as she peels
back at a bulbous grapefruit.

Holds each skin like a prism
to the pinhole
light of sage dust
descending into lashes
with each close
eyed breath and opens
each way to open.

Mother descends
to porcelain pond
a cloaked and stoned child
fountain spitting water
its center, the anklebone
and alabaster plastered weight.

She bears the great and loose fruit
pink inner thigh in spoon
opening with small, citrus soaps
on the smog of lily
paddies and inhales a coat
of Evergreen needles,
the bitterness slipping down
her throat in between
crouching and the fresh bulb roots
itself
on the outside.

Mother tells me to go,
grow my own bones
in the night.

III.

And now
on the outside
mother reads tarot
in the back
overnight.

Rubs at her elbows—
grapefruit in third eye
and pulls (by the nape)
like a basement mannequin hand
away (to the left, around the stairs)
into the orchard of small
knotted things
and she digs.

She digs with her thumb
to its core
through a tough, pulped deposit
keeps her thumb
positioned in the pink,
an inhale of sage
and sugar fumes
because it gives her a place
to empty the men
like strata,
into a safe
imitation of a stone
cloaked child.

To empty the men
like vertigo strata,
she watches from the roots
of her old back table
under loose lighting
mosquito net, release
each year that passes
up an unhooked man
in a quiet way.

Mother tells me to go,
grow my own bones
in the night,
she can bear this alone.

The Black Turtleneck

Tuesday was dad's one-wound check-inn's-at four room with a shot-gun balancing its metal, slim tongue

*

on the stool with a broken, a top-heavy balance; mother sat still with stomach buttered, heartbeat's still

*

with swollen feet I'd walk into the diner where seventy-cent powder cakes, eggs thinly lined my inside

*

where inside was exclusive, a step of parental-push consensual eggplant fingertips; embalmed wrists

*

as I threaded my eyes like an ex-oracles, shut, with gasoline dripping on faith and the Bible

*

between phalange sweats from creaking floorboards on the midnight hall; snow-globe-entrapment

Father burned all the fairy and colorful books in the house during an intoxication, so that mother might not be able to raise his girls to be dreamers.

Mother would creep down the hall on its youngest boards—antiques planked out from winter swells. A two knuckle knock pressed against door almost just with hot breath at ten brought a benign '68 photograph in her shaking palm to my bed's frame with still youth and gap-toothed grin on its rubbed face.

A cursive name tagged on its coarse white spine bent her face in rays through window street-light onto deep cheekbone and dagger chin of the young girl in print with ankle-flare jeans. We pulled the blanket like an elastic gloss over our heads and by keychain light we were ready. All I could see was the ripped corners of her lips and edges of her eyes and the photograph placed in space between our crossed knees and in the space between what has happened to her lips? What has happened?

The '68 photograph had a small girl in a pool sitting in shallows with pencil knees crossed in soggy jeans and bare, tight chest with an orange peel stretching across her gap-toothed grin. "Mama, is that you and Opapa?"

Mother would untie her hair when my eyes fixed on her eye lumps and let it hang loose enough to fade brandy knuckles in and out while telling of a water nymph with blue legs and a chest that could blind men to fumble around for years snatching at fish that they mistook for their wives. Her eyes would turn fast behind the corner that her neck notched itself into when the master bedroom's toilet would swirl the water of an awakened man down pipes and she would carry her calves one by one from my mattress to the floor, rub her palm around my shoulder, crease the photograph between her ankle and sock, and sigh.

Father filled her mobile phone with sailor words and then crossed-heart promises until she dropped where she was going and turned it around, again.

The eggplant bruise that bloomed just above her blouse's collar bobbed in and out of my eyes as I bobbed on her left hip that swished, every other breath with the sound of her wedged soles heading for an eternal, neon exit. Fishtailed smoke and rearview glance pressed on oval, '78 pinstriped glass.

She knocked the polished head into park and I climbed from the bucket seat onto loading-zone pavement while she laid her head on the horn. I leaned my elbows into the side of hot metal and looked into stained-glass birds and prism ornaments hanging above white space, black letters

EMERGENCY HOURS

One of her eyes I could see had a crack in it—been cracked and I noticed I hadn't noticed her face until the horn vibrated her chin up an inch. I looked up to see leeches boiling toward her cheeks, filling her—poking through weak, white flesh.

A smoking nurse pushed out a shot-glass of smoke through her lip corners, hard, and squinted toward the horn. I raised my chin up an inch toward the nurse to assure her the horn was blaring from a head swelling over it. But she saw that nurse with a wheelchair, torn pocket—cigarette trail—fast pace and adjusted the mirror, buckled my strap, knocked the head into fifth, and headed south toward Denny's.

Father was at the top of the stairs with a rag over bloody knuckles while her squished child bled onto the tops of her feet as we ran to the car.

Her swollen belly with concave bits, its middle still and spoiled, sat in the front bucket seat while I threaded my fingers in and out of back seat holes where seatbelt bones dried deep. With every foot pump for red signs and lights, her stomach would fall more into leather between her thighs like a boulder soon to break off.

Father let mother name Sabrina, but demanded that he name me. When my mother joked in the hospital that it was her right, he knocked her ice chips out of her cup.

On my eighth birthday I woke with sister unbraidng my hair and flattening my cheeks with her palms and my palms were folded prayer-spade in my lap. "I love you, Jessie. Happy Birthday. I hope you love me back." Digging my fingers above her knuckles I fixed my eyes into marble glaze and said, "I want Oma." She held my hand back, hard, drawing blood and told me to listen to her, that the dark had a lot more territory.

Father cracked mother's nose into pieces; three reconstructive surgeries and restraint back in place.

Tuesday was father's one-wound check-inn's at four room with a shot-gun balancing its metal, slim tongue between sweaty air and cheek.

The smoking nurse pushed out a wine-glass rim, a ring of smoke near the lobby doors
and asked again what floor? Two lefts after the unisex-wheelchair-access
able bathrooms. The lilac paintings framed in plastic wood
lined the mute walls
while my hands snapped and my tongue clicked to a beat in my head—ear buds in the car.
Mother snapped her eyes on me and my hands
webbed into thigh pocket hibernation.

The swollen benches for waiting reminded me of when dad used to drink and splash whiskey and paint on the furniture, swing me in one arm asking
what do you want to land on, the dog or the floor or the dog? Two elbows
the size of extra large eggs kept me sitting with my spine framed in cheap shoe strings
and bubble wrapped
cubes of cold.

The metal morgue doors without swing save a white-coated man
swaying with a clipboard and ear buds
in, asked her maiden name
and for us to follow him, it was ten 'til
closing do you think this is appropriate for a child? For a child?
Two metal canoes were pulled
out from the wall with cloths over figures
of last-breath-breasted chests cages
Extended. I picked up a black thick-tipped pen that smelled of salt and drew a raven tattoo on my forearm and cash symbols.
The lab-coat asked what child would be so foolish. Two faces,
Arranged in logical order, closed eyes, and everything else sewn together and pushed into shape and dotted with black permanence of past instruction—construction.

The smoking nurse was sitting now, a new pack's wrapper between her fingers and did
You reach the morgue? Poor child's father just quit like that in a rented room?
And she lit up her lips again with edges of paper and ash—blew a ring at my back
and I turned just in time to stick my tongue out.

Damn shame.

Father was barely boxed up before a summer and October passed when she remarried the same man she would always marry. She worked the night shifts and I worked to cover his beer breath before they rested side by side or met her on Sunday's for church.

Dripping moonshine and coins from his palms,
he would stumble to a rest on the midnight stairs
illuminated with nearby neon, fishnet thighs, arrows,
and moan my name through echoing staccato ceiling.

He would clasp my hips as I hoisted off his glittered work boots
and bury his head with open mouth into my inhaled belly
hard with still breath while in between quick pants and sucking
hiccups, he talked about what he owed my mother and thick bar tabs.

Dripping moonshine down my night-shirt he would trail
like a train car, holding edges of my shoulders up the stairs,
touching every knob of every door and with each he would ask the
Lord to punish his old wives for leaving such a Christian man.

He soaked through the queen satin sheets as I laid him
down, curled his knees into chest and asked for me to
wake him at nine for church service as he was meeting my
mother for black cappuccinos, verse and reconciliation.

I woke him with a bath in the claw-footed porcelain and set
an outfit on the mattress with shined shoes as I ran through
a last minute check—ripped four stubs from Panty Paradise Nightclub
and replaced his pocket with an eggshell handkerchief.

Step-father settled for eleven years until mother found the photographs of her youngest child's bald curves in a tin box beneath his shoe racks. He burned each of the small elbows and flat chests in the downstairs fireplace before the sheriff's department knocked.

He demanded I take my clothes to the floor and turn to the side he could see my ribcage from. Later, the emails came.

Hey Jessie, How's everything going? Remember the lavender animal print nylon shorts and top? That would be good for the pictures for the kung fu web site. I need one to the front, back and side. The other sets will be for only US to see only (your personal areas you want to work on). Your mom usually takes these in her tiny underwear and topless which is a good idea (front, back, and side). The more skin you see the better to evaluate the start and finish results. Don't worry, I promise NO one will ever see them! I'm going to start a personal file for you and design specific areas to target with the stone warrior exercises. I love you! Me



>From: Paul Guerrero
>To: Jessica Crockett
>Subject: Re: Hello
>Date: Wed, 22 Aug 2007 14:00:05 -0700 (PDT)

Hey Babe, I still haven't read your letter but I know what to expect. You sound conflicted and in turmoil. I hear where your coming from though but I still think you should give him alot more time before you start seeing him again. I know this is a VERY personal question but is it true your Bi-sexual? or where you just curious and experimented. It doesn't matter to me I still will LOVE you regardless! If you are ever curious about anything I will tell you what I know and it will remain in confidence for ever. Very tired, haven't slept in three days. Love you!

>From: Paul Guerrero
>To: Jessica Crockett
>Subject: Privacy
9/10/07
To: Jessica Crockett
Paul Guerrero

Dear Jess, I think you know your mom has been reading our e-mails. enough said, I just found out this morning and your mom is accusing me of being a weirdo. I tried to tell her that I sent you an e-mail to forget about the pictures but she will not listen. Anyway, like I told you I have no privacy and I am probably going to end up leaving soon. I hope all goes well with your life. I still think the stone warrior is the secret to your weight issues and should be done daily. Good luck with you and Brandon. This will be my last e-mail if you wish to talk to me you will have to call me from now on. Alternate arrangements will have to be made as well for taking your stuff to school. I want you to know I just wanted to help you and I should not have mentioned how your mother took her before and after pictures. I never planned on looking at them thats why you were to take them yourself. The ones for the result test were the ones to be sent. Hope all is well , Please take care of yourself, Me.

Chorus:

Hanging its gummy neck with signed, triangle note from God, he delivers the ball of flesh into the chimney of ivy-brick and rolodex of rotting fathers.

The tiny child curls with toes inside the sack, is slinging close enough to the stork's eyes to see marbles gold in their middle. Close enough she sees feathers and beak and a small golden hat with string meeting in bundle under the chin with a cross as its fuse. She remembers the feathers and beak and the night at night when behind her eyes she sees something hot and gold dangling just out of her grasp if she were to try.

The child ages to seven years old and listens through the floorboards of her pocket room to the floors below and thinks of the time Rapunzel lost sulking rather than fanning her hair out on the floor and listening below rather than out windows that proved nothing but echo of misguided origin. She slowly crawls her ear almost twenty steps toward her door when she hears the front door close quite tight and the locks knotted one by one down the column of four. Her father had come back with lilies white but had left her mother's face like the inside of squeezed grapefruit with seeds and anything but white pushed to surface and knotted locks. She then bunched up her short, tight curls from the floor into a tight mess of stray ends as her mother had cut off all the hair in the house for safety of any child or female being swung from it again.

The twelve year old girl grows her hair straight for a while and ties it in knots with her fingers when reading her father's obituary to see if any moment brings a different moment than the previous night when she read it. Tea sits cold on the stool beside her bedding as it has each time she thinks. How the suicide coroner report isn't stopping her from feeling anything but tin. She leans the dented in parts of the back of her head to the wall and brings a curtain of eyelid to clench wrinkles into some shape of memory.

At seventeen she rushes to the morning to roll up her lids and cry. She cries out all she has waited for and smiles beneath the dream of the stork's dangling cross above her forehead and grips her cross around her neck for the first time. She knows that her step-father will return to her bed on any night and that her mother will always flinch when an arm is raised even just to grab a bundle of grapes but her tears and the numbness in her toes make her feel human. There's an absence of something and to her it feels good.

The Mother Poem

Seventeen beheaded seahorses
like sequins on the breast
of your beige cardigan,
rattle when you shake to the right
as you talk to me late
about your late father
in your mother's mind
and diamond studio
and she told you,
go to bed with your milk and cheese,
quiet down,
the night will tell you what is what
and the men will always
be slushing their words,
dance with it Katellina, dance
under their swing
with it long as you can.

And you hand me a milk jar
and tell me to go, Jesselah,
do the same for your sticky
old mother.
Go, grow your own bones
in the night.

You use a pear knife on foil to slip
heads off the pumice-stone bodies
string them to mummify
and in the corner
of your mind and diamond studio,
a tack holding Jesus upside down with
a shard of foil covering his mouth,
small letters in glitter:
Beading's a trifflin bitch.

And you hand me a milk jar
and tell me to go, Jesselah,
do the same for your sticky
old mother.
Go, grow your own bones
in the night.

You're the revolution of all the Chevy
motored homes broken
at the bottom of the

salt and sea,
the one that something or someone
parted, giving them a place
of belonging to one another while transparent
acid plumbs change the rate
of reproduction and the seahorses
deep inside exhale cannot fill their grape
sized chests with one more breath.

And you hand me a milk jar
and tell me to go, Jesselah,
do the same for your sticky
old mother.
Go, grow your own bones
in the night.

I look at your wild eyes
your broken nose
your slushing words
in bandages
flapping,
and think
this must be art.

Kitten

I am a collector of cards that mean nothing to me. I buy them based on cheapness. If I let them sit long enough, they start belonging to you, father. They all start looking like women even though the last one I bought in Portland was of a small housecat surrounded by miniature furniture for a Godzilla effect. The cat also had a small monocle and top hat but I just saw this orange cat as young, a little overweight and possibly middle-class because there was a chandelier in the corner. Small furniture. Large cat. No fuss.

I address the cards to you, father, when I find myself with vulva blinders on. It's a strange, small place to be in. A bubble forms itself around me and lets me see nothing other than the thought of a woman. The coffee stain at the edge of my briefcase. The small paint smudge on the bathroom tile, mauve eggshell if a vulva was mauve with an eggshell finish. The diamond cut pico de gallo in my guacamole. When I see vulvas, I go to the cards. I take the card by its face and see the cat. But the cat is now a she and demands to be taken seriously and I write to you, father.

I write about Scotland and how I miss us there. I write to you, dear father, about olives being underrated and about French seeming less and less permeable as a language. I just simply write to you instead of all the women that I know will come stacked at a later date for a later meaning. Until the cards deplete in my broken hutch I am bound to your echo seeming so hot in my ear that I wait on Harold, my mailman, for a birthday card. Not a fancy one. Not even one with a cake on its front. A simple 4x4 card with a vulva on its face. Because that's what you would have done if you lived a few years longer, dear father.

Portrait of a Flattening

My hands were a perfect pair. But one crooked around the edges in a scar-tissue way. I motioned for mother to come closer, to braid me up and watched her braid half of the most perfect fishtail braid into my translucent and babydoll hair. Her hands weren't the way they should have. Her humming a bit out of synch with itself; thumping the flat end of the brush against my twitching to her taffy pulling. Her hands and their space so wide that my hair fell further and further until the fishtail spun out and about and all was lost for the fourth time. Mother often thought of the Vietnam War neighborman in a crouched gaze with a missing left hand. He passed our front window, tracing the side of our house with his thin metal hand. A comb tucked in the seafoam green of his plaid-breast mumbling, "oh the memories and sinkholes, they'll open and the collapse and the ending." The comb would fold itself into his chest—into closer nothingness over and over again until its dot of existence bore through the man's chest. Mother would watch and mouth the mumbles like a hymn and thump the flat end of the brush at my twitch and worry about him disturbing her red rock garden lines. The fishtail braid would smell of lavender and small, delicate souvenir soaps and remind the man of his childhood home. Or so I've been told. Mother's hands should have been more slender.

Portrait of a Tunnel

My father left his study open. His hands pressed lightly atop book jackets. Jackets tearing themselves a notch outside peripheral. His hands pressed against all things small and uneven in the open study. If you look closer, into the wedge of eyespace, there's a dancer in shredded jackets just beyond the shelves. If you look closer, at her hands, you can see her perfectly rounded fingers and tips of cuticle oil in small, blush pools. She dances behind his craved edition of *The Old Man and the Sea* and floats down slowly. Echoes float down slowly if you can catch them in midtrance. It is useless to fall away from your memories. It is useless to remember the first voice. The echo roots in the wedged eyespace of the moment that my father lifted me into a wide leap, slick bun and told me that the world was smaller than it appeared. A pinhole is useless in the night. The dancer looks back and can no longer bend. Her oil on the jackets dissolve through vowels. Statue behind the edition, she narrows. The echo is all that becomes.

Portrait of the Sides of a Small Child

For my father, who tangled his car around a tree drunk driving on Halloween night.

It is entangled. It is entangled, the descent, look closer. If you look closer you will see that its tangle is between her fourth and fifth spinewing, her mermaid vertebrae. Her fusion in tomorrow's billowey white and tunic-long nightdress, look closely, how it carries. Beside and in front if you look behind, look how it carries, the bedroom and the cool. The floor, REM's chaotic humor. It is a brushed and stroked story and brushed out if you look closer at the tangles. It will not come to a mountain or town that is near and/or around the father left on a whim-nap.

It is a pipet of an arm in dislocation of having an elbow or training bra role model and small fly-like silk. Type of wings and then a pipet of an arm over there, gather it? Pulling pipet strings to make the seahorse dance to the musical bubbles of air she pinhole-lipped blew into his flat face. Up to the pipet arms and noodled ankles with wings that almost mean nothing. Nothing can jump into the swirl long enough to stay. To stay in motion with the Sephora green of walls falling into a damper muddied green is hardly ever something to avoid. With the night falling in the surfacing shutter of eyelids, opening pistachio size to the smell of pepperjack-chili and butter smoke and the clinking of chalk-top perfume bottles. The perfume her father was emptying into the kitchen sink.

It is entangled in the hallway and in the bathroom and then it is entangled when what could be a small pug's whimpering comes from under the door. No patter, no rhythm, just father's face when he got lost in the mountains. His face a tangle. Three bottles of water and three zip-dried meals. Or so we are told.

Sweet Tea

You called me sweet tea when you scooped me from the floor nap.

My first girl demanded I take my clothes to the floor and turn to the side she could best see my ribcage blossom from with nervous breath. The unicorn gray-scaled-Japanese-stick tattoo placed between my second and seventh rib, counting from the bottom if you're German and opposite if you're Scottish, was the first portion that she ran her fingers around before asking if I knew what an artichoke kiss was.

You had shown me how to properly salt a cucumber, an apple, and right before I left for camp I asked you what the new type of lettuce was in the fridge. I assume now that the lettuce in fact was an aged artichoke sitting a shelf to its own, in the cold box, the space between what needed salt to revive its lush-green core. She told me that limejuice was a lesbian perfume—that it would take away any sense of a day spent in between new bedding and bare skins. Dab a little lime on the strip of your underwear. But that if I was bisexual, sweet tea would do. Sweet tea in the small space between cloth and crease and the indecisive. But at that exact moment all I could think about was the salt on my skin from the last day of camp when the conditioners broke and the bus was filled with lake water girls.

You called me sweet tea when you scooped me from the floor nap so that I might not grow any further out and away from you.

J: A significant story that Oma's told you about the war²⁵.

K: I remember her descriptions of everyone running while the planes above were dropping bombs and people were dying. Not really more than that.



²⁵ WWII.

Objects from Little Germany

I. Salza

Seven hour connect plane and peanuts, give me peanuts, what am I, Heidi Klum?

—My grandmother on July 16th, 2007

We had been driving in circles, going on the fourth gallon of middle-priced summer gas, in conflict about where to find the spiciest salsa. And by spiciest, my grandmother, Oma, meant she wanted it mild but to call it spicy because she used to eat chilies by the bushel to stay warm in a poor, German winter following the war clean-up she and Aunt Liesel arranged to bleach the cobblestone before hanging rugs. She kept rubbing her Hushpuppies against the maroon-gray tweed of my '91 Tracer to kick up the pug hair, sigh, kick up, "Humph, dogs, raining, Seaddle. Nodting like my rain in Germany."

There was a ruby-dyed goatskin clutch and language barrier tucked in a snug under her arm and the war, a thin line behind her brow. With Oma back after four weeks in Darmstadt visiting her youngest polio-sick, fading sister, she was sent with seventy Euros from her childhood church (and six sisters) and a foodie-mission. Her sisters packed her socks with peppers wrapped in Euros for the plane, and asked her to please finally try the American salsa because her oldest sister, Elzbieta, said that Americans had good onions, unions, decent light rail, and war-hot-habanera salsa: "You are de soldure vife, know? Ve vant to know. No more hiding Liza. Tell. Tell uz."

Elzbieta had also stuffed Oma's carry-on felt hatbox with a pocket English dictionary but Oma decided to leave it behind, "In airport trash, know?" And this was the way Oma talked, in circles. She talked with verb, then noun, then rhetorical "know?" because her father had taught her to never be negative in public. Her father had taught her to never use the word "no" but instead pose a question because as he said, "Americans like dhat sort ove dthing." She did save "no" for select, special occasions such as when I asked if I could go to the mall, or when I told her that I was going to more college, or when I told her that I was getting an IUD implant, or when I told her that I was a lesbian. She resisted the English language and body to avoid such conversations and her sisters must have assumed as much when she made fun of, "American width dher hippy glasses, furry boots and bangs in face like poodle. It confusing, know? Hod. Cold. Which dhey vant? Father would lauff and lauff."

We were almost there, so very close to the Mazatlan off south Meridian where the new Wal-Mart construction was taking up almost all lanes; the small green, white, and red letters "Still Open Since 1994" seemed to be in competition with the "digger" for parking. "Dhey seem almosd oudda here, you sure dhey have salza in dhere? Same places always sday on German street. Ms. Schelbzer sdill blue farm width barn oud back. Still same chickens from your birdhday, know?"

But we had been in the car since the airport and if stopping wasn't an option things were not going to go so well for, well, everyone, including the small, unaware pepper boiled-then-corned onions in the four star salsa. She grasped her clutch purse as I knocked the car into park and an envelope with "Jesselah" across its front slipped out and onto the tweed. "Nod for now, now is for das salza and das deep stomach das good Lord gave me."

When we ordered Oma kept asking for Cheetos and I kept having to say, “She’ll have the nachos, yes, the nachos grande with habanero cubes. Cubes Oma, look, like square. Like chopped. Yes Oma, you *do* want the nachos. They’ve always been called nachos. Sir? Sir? Yes, I’ll have the spicy cucumber and carrot sampler. No, she’s being ridiculous I’ll have the sampler without dairy. No, no cheese. No ranch. Right, no cheese. Oma, no. Because I don’t eat it. None. Yes sir, zero cheese.” But this was no good because she had always meant what she said and that was your fault for not being on top of semantics or what she called, “Same dthing.” Nonetheless she had married the American Jack during war who never corrected her, but chose to imitate her with the grandchildren at birthday parties and then the clean-up, “Shutzie. A joke. It’s only a joke. Joke, you know, ha ha? Here, let’s hand the rugs together. Shutzie, don’t worry, the children love you.”

“Zhack!” she would call him from the top of the stairs which she said had always been sloped and not to buy a sloped house or be one of those veggie lovers when there was no war to skip meat for. “A sloped house is das same as soggy farm. And vhad’s farm vidhoud cow, know?” She would call him from the top of the stairs even though she knew he was outside cutting grass in the infinity design she traced with her finger against the pane above the sink so that he could see exactly how she favored structure. They spoke more in fights, fog, and passport fingerprints than anything else, but always matched tie to broach come Sunday morning, “for children, know?”

Oma was the only generation to skip what she called the “Procrastivation Gene” that has kept her children out of marriage; she would tell Zhack, “Fivdy years and you do vhat for me, know?” so that later, during *Everybody Loves Raymond*, she could remain upset

in her hand-sanded rocker since she'd called him and he didn't come to help her look at the stair's tendency to slope.

During dinner under the television's distraction was also the usual time when Zhack, Opa, would bring in a new Sylvia Plath or Anais Ninn book he'd picked up for me at the ironic after-church-casino-buffet swap-meet (or swap-meet-buffet, I can never remember the odd places he would shadow to prolong the drive home) and two small packets of block tofu hidden inside an almost-empty Cheetos bag; he had no idea that I loved women writers, faces, legs, and that I fought hard against idea that a man in a gold-leaf book most likely created me from boredom. Opa never looked much into my readings, or the fact that I could read three years above my grade, he just tried to do his best to deliver and hoped that at some point I would see what the Lord had to say.

Sneaking tofu to a vegetarian granddaughter was dangerous for an old man whose wife flew into fits when her meat-cooking was not the chosen one. I'm not certain if he snuck me tofu for my needs or for his need to care for someone post-war after that baby he was carrying died so quietly that he didn't feel her cave before he arrived back at the camp to fetch already bloody cloths; I like to think he swaddled her anyway, with the least stained cloth. He was quiet and small. He was stubborn and small. Most of the time he was just small. Small enough to always swaddle me into his lap blanket so that we could watch the History Channel together after Oma had drifted off in her corner chair; she always sat near the sliding glass door, on her own island, looking out to make sure the yard (especially in the dark) was vacant.

He loved my older sister Sabrina, yes, but not as long or as hard or with as much money as all others had for the first child; Opa made certain to take photographs of me even when my bouncing Tourette hands fuzzed the picture; he took me in, tight. I could sometimes see Oma in the television when the commercials turned black, staring at my feet like I didn't deserve them. I was too embarrassed to wear the loafers that she had shipped each year from Germany and I loved the glittery boots and jellies Opa bought me year after year at *Hot Topic* and *Payless*. I could sometimes see Oma letting me go, slowly, as her German-scarf-wrapped, salt-loving Christian. *But I am the German she wants.*

I often dream of being pregnant without reason in front of a sliding glass door after spicy dinners. I also dream of Cheetos before test days when I wake thinking I've missed sixty percent of my grade and too-slowly realize that I have a bad taste in my mouth and four hours to kill before even thinking of getting dressed though I've already shoved glitter boots over sheepskin slippers, a meta-footwear. When I crawl back into bed I usually fall asleep with Oma's voice small but like a passing car's bass, "In school can have das baby. Can do all of it, know?" *But I am not the German she wants.*

II. Left-Over Salza

Your Opa vas no good ov father. You see him now, but you don't see him dhen. You, you would make good mudher.

--Oma, when I returned from the bathroom and we had not been talking about Opa.

Mazatlan did not refill her water. Mazatlan did not come by to check on the table because as she ate the nachos she made a squished, "I've just eaten squash and I despise my mother's

squash” face when scooping the house-habanera salsa into her mouth with forefinger and thumb.

“Id’s like wadder-kedchup, led’s go another place,” she said and grabbed her clutch, an envelope corner still peeking out.

“Oma, everything else is closed, even Safeway.”

“Vell, I’m judsd saying, I come all das vay bag here from plane and you sdill not pregnand, dhere’s all dhis dime without var to ged on vith it. Children are symbol of selve-expression.” She began sliding arranging leftovers into her plastic-lined purse, being careful not to get the fragments on the enveloped and repeated, “selve-expression” a few more times to get used to the sound.

I placed my napkin on my plate and proceeded to lay down a heavy tip. “Married Oma, you mean I’m not married.” I helped her out of the booth and I waited a beat before we both said together, “Same dhing.”

III. Nazi Youth Armband

I live by das Bible. Hitler did no such dhing, dad man, he lived for das self.

—Oma, on answering any question.

For the first few decades of my life I spent weekends sleeping at my grandparents’s house. I still dream of my Oma, often, but I can never recall if Oma is telling me my dreams or if I am asleep. She is not a lady who believes in fabrications or striations from the divine as being a dishonorable discharged member of the Nazi Youth taught her to make a living out of opportunities to be born again, know? and that dreaming is for the safe and the ignorant. “I

keep das armband so dhad your Opa know jusd vhat I saw vhen he vands do dell you children dhad he's das good one—das experienced one do dell you school iz mosd impordand nod making family, know? I vas one to flee coundry and stard over vidth no school.” It was the night before my middle-school graduation dance when Oma found the tofu wrappers and quickly entered my nap.

“You no go do no dance, no?” she said as she closed my bedroom door behind her, her back covering the knob. The lock clicked and I turned on my lamp.

“But Oma, this is the dance I’m on the planning committee for, I have to go. I’m in the set-up crew and in charge of one hundred balloons. What happened? Did the school call?”

“You damn vell know vhad you done and I do nod dolerade liars in das house.” She walked over to my small, orange garbage can and pulled the wrapper from under newspapers I’d shoved down. “Zhack” she said, shaking her head.

“I made Opa buy them he didn’t do anything,” I said, starting to cry as I propped myself against the headboard.

“Vhell, you jusd cand be drusded and dhad das lasd dime you vith dhad man when I’m nod around, asking for crazy dhings. Come do das mirror, now.” She advanced toward my shell of a body and I sprung up.

“But Oma I don’t want to do this again. I know what you want, I’m sorry.” She grabbed me by the shoulders and said, “Come, look ad yourselve.” She propped my eyes to the mirror holding my chin, hard. “Look how ugly you are vhen you cry.”

IV. California King

*“Das vas my modders and her modders bed and you become vomen juds da same bud you
small, you small, weak girl need more boeurger.”*

—Oma on October 7th, 2004.

On the morning of my sixteenth birthday, I got my period in the very middle of Oma’s pillow-top mattress and lay there, palms in blades as if I was going to fade into a sinkhole of bleeding out silk scarves should I move an inch otherwise. “Das my girl. Now you finally voman. Get vashed, cresprie and coffee ready.” I didn’t want to “wash” with her still in the room circling the bed like a bottom feeding shark. My hesitation to own what had come in the night and out from my body like a 40 oz. steak, thawing, into a mass of small muscles and sludge angered her. She went to the closet where she kept the Nazi Youth armband.

She kept it next to the bag of collector Beanie Babies (she gave me Dolly the Dolphin that year) and I remember her sitting there, the bleached, mint-condition thing on the edge of the bed, and her using two long hairpins from over her ears—bun chopsticks to lift it up to the light as if it were transfer paper, examining what I assumed was the front, then back, something else and then the front again.

It was this something else that caused her to use hairpins rather than chancing a fingerprint. She sighed and in a very low voice, for herself said, “I vanted to save dhem. I vanted to sday in Hungary but vhen dhey say make da soldier socks you made the soldiers socks and judst think later about id.” I wrapped myself in the damp, red sheets and got up to wash so that she would slip the band back in its sleeve. It wasn’t the armband that created a strain on what I could only determine was my soul but it was the way that she lived with the

thing that always made me secede. “Someday Jesselah, you find good group church people, know? Ricky coming tonighd, vash exdra good.”

The armband usually made an appearance on birthdays or holidays or an epilogue to sexual alterations. I had started dating Ricky, a family friend’s boy who fit the bill: German, blonde, light eyes but not the kind you could say were this or that, as tall as me, in the church band, and freshly knew I was menstruating, a relief after prepubescent pregnancy, as Oma greeted his family with the “good news” that night. As he came in the door with a saran-wrapped pumpkin-swirled stohollen and a mousse-spread German Chocolate cake with a gate of ladyfingers and hazelnuts at its feet, I realized that I hated the fact that Ricky owned a penis which led me to believe that we might not work out. I would let him down easy that night as I loaded the washer with red sheets and Oxyclean after dessert tea and stohollen.

Peppered smoke and pig on an early Saturday evening and fat filling the second floor with, well, that “obviously cooking fat” smell was only the beginning. Oma had started keeping a Children’s Bible on the top shelf of the spice cabinet just in case I wasn’t sure where the basil or what being heterosexual was; “Nexd do Bible sveddie. You see id, know?” She only called me “sveddie” in front of Ricky’s parents and during church offerings. The Bible would fall twice that dinner, once landing on the burner, a small, smothered sound, and the other time to the floor.

It was only halfway into my sixteenth year when I started to bring girls from Spanish and Pottery class to dinner that Oma insisted Ricky’s family regularly join us for dinner and started to cook greater pounds of meat even though I had finally told her I was vegan—that I

didn't want to eat flesh off of bones. "You see vhad real vegan does when you see people skin burned off das bones and only dhing around for your family is cow, know?"

V. Tresemme, Herbal Essences, Pert Plus

Bulk up Jesselah, men like sdrong vomen in mind and leg.

—Oma, each time Ricky's family was over.

And then there's grace. The moment with Samantha from Pottery and Ricky circling the appetizers to seat themselves close to me without looking intentional; the strongest stands until the end. "Pleaze be seadded." It was in this moment that I wanted to "vash" again to get away from the situation. To get away from the brushed-gold edged table when everyone looked into their plate—through their plate, planned futures in blade-clasped prayer north of their potato cakes, with me. I slipped Ricky electronic Solitaire underneath the table because I knew him and wanted him to fade away. This life that I would live would need to leave the lesbian, the vegan, the cylinder-textured mustard-glazed pots and vases in me behind as to not confuse the woman of war and threaten a good bacon-cauliflower crumble dish.

And that, that is a dead thing, that is, a perfectly roasted whole pig.

The distance between the table and me as I pushed out with my palms became a distance manageable if I could just descend somewhere past the floors covered in German rugs. To feel the bare stone under layered antique was like finding the middle of a Venus flytrap, the middle of a violent, sleeping flower. I headed for the bathroom tile. I stood in the mirror thinking about how beautiful Sam would be if she cried. I stood thinking about Sam's hands shaping the quick wheel of clay and then moved to the shower drain and fought

off a cry. I poured shampoos to give me time to think longer about women in the bathroom. I poured shampoos straight from bottle to drain to give me time to think about women in the shower, standing; an image that cut deep against the laughing Oma and Ricky upstairs. I poured out all the shampoos to give me time to think about lesbian colors, how they would swirl only in light pearls at the edge of the porcelain, and how they would never dry if left alone. I gagged on the idea of hot dogs. I thought about Sam with her long and gold hair in a fishtail braid, laying as it always did on her left shoulder slowly unspooling, and how I never wanted it to stop. I thought about Sam with paint on her jean knees because she said it kept the boys away. I thought about drowning, and I thought about hot dogs.

After twenty minutes Oma noticed that I was absent and called me from the top of the stairs to aid with setting dessert plates and to notice the sloping floor. The Bible fell when we arranged sweetened pork-fleishelacht pot pies and evening tea. It made a small, smothered sound atop the burner. It was in this moment, the one where I let a seventy-six year old woman bend, on principle, her back pulling like reins against the motion of running over war train tracks, when I came to love her for not leaving me.

There must have been many times when she had to shut the Bible and just “go on” with buying new shampoo at the rate of milk to balance out my habit of pouring it out. To balance my habit of passing the time between who I was and who she wanted me to be. And to be fair, there was usually a spinach salad that she could drench, fluff and serve in minutes if she thought that I was looking pale or particularly thin for the week.

VI. Mirror

*You do vhad you supposed do do and somedimes vhad you supposed do do is going be duff,
so you look in das mirror and you ged duff.*

—Oma, 1990-2010.

I walked Sam home and begged her not to cut her hair; Oma would become suspicious if Sam did not fit the bill. I held her hand for the last few and dark moments outside her tumbler house, but had to go home and do the dishes before anything else. I picked up the newspaper, turned the front porch light on and stepped in the front door, locked it behind me and started for the kitchen. As I passed the staircase opening to the third floor I heard a faint, agitated sound. I slipped off my shoes and quietly ascended the stairs.

The noise was coming from the bathroom and with the door a crack open and the crack lit with a small glow, I lightly pushed on its swing. And there she was still in apron, flour in the back of her hair, a pen in her hand, and crying into the mirror. And there it was, my unlatched diary sitting atop the toilet's lid.

"Oma, what are you doing in here?" I asked and sat on the rim of the bathtub. I was too scared to ask about the diary. "Our shows are almost on and the dishes will not take me that long."

"You dhink id so easy do raze child. You forged vhere you come from. You forged vhat happen and vhad I go through for you to do dis to me, like dis." She continued to stare into the mirror, did not turn toward me and just pointed to the door.

"Oma. I don't want to leave. Ricky is a nice boy. I can work harder."

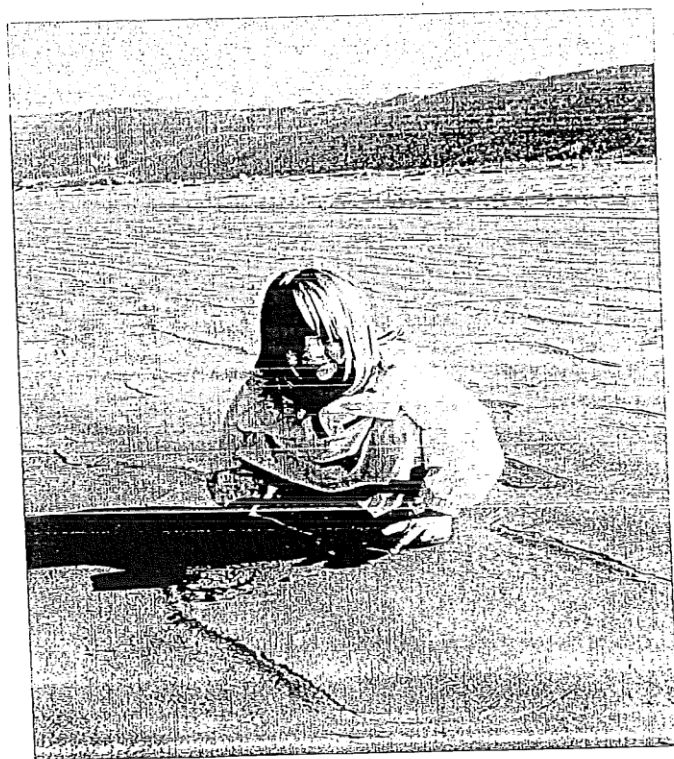
“Leave now. Leave for good. You are das modder.” She pointed to the door and I took to the downstairs to make popcorn and wait in the kitchen to hear if she was going to come down. I made popcorn to pair with reruns of *Everybody Loves Raymond* and knocked the Bible to the ground when reaching for sea-salt. With my heel, I slid it slowly under the stove.

Tomato Elbows

You only apologize when you have shord dime levft in das world.

Das Oma

Oma tells me that my infancy was in her hands and that she had held me in a wrap-around-pouch at her front even when I slept for fear that I might be taken away from her, because in war, babies were treated as debt paid. How she didn't know she could roll over and suffocate me and how she was sorry for that. How she didn't know that smoking was bad around children, and that finally she was sorry for forcing me get the chicken pox sooner than later when Josephine down the road had them. She took me over there to get it over with and I got them hard, in my mouth.

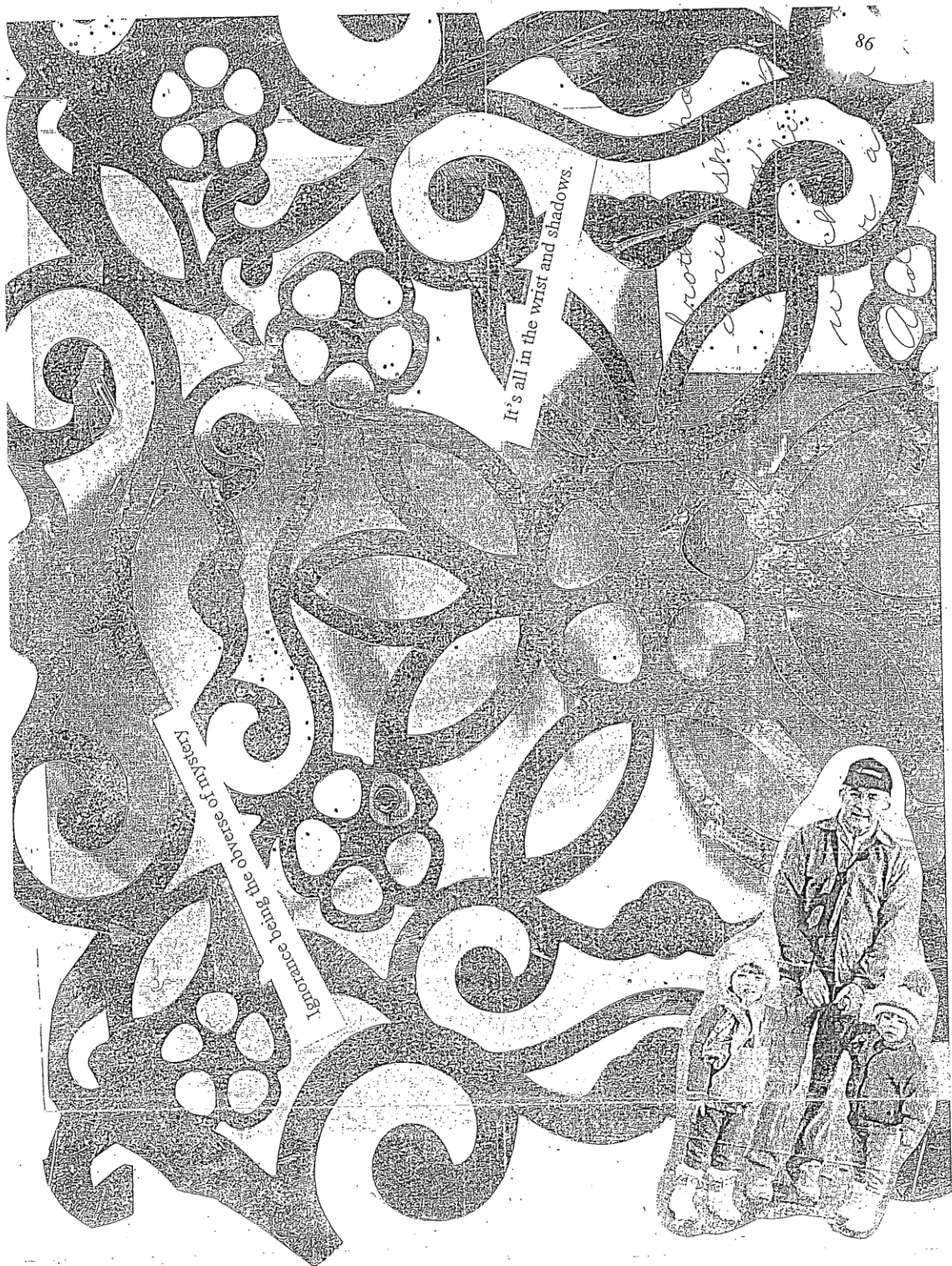


J: A significant story that Opa's told you about the war²⁶.

K: I don't think Opa has told me any come to think of it. I'm starting to meet with him once a week after I get back from Mexico (3/4-11) and we're going through everything. He says he's been forgetting and it will be too late if we don't start now.

Jess, if you see them and want to record them talking for this one, that'd be really cool.

²⁶ WWII or Vietnam.



Honor Flight

I.

For the first few decades of my life, I spent most weekends sleeping at my grandparents' tumbler house. The pillows on my overnight couch were my favorite shade of peach, but were smothered in cigarette smoke and chalky German perfumes. Oma is not a lady who believes in straying from the divine; her mile-long town in Hungary was raided during the night in World War II and she was immediately enlisted in the Nazi Youth. "You made a living out of opportunities before you were born, know Jesselah? You find God when God challenges you to love others."

And Opa is not a man who speaks highly of my mother, his daughter, who spent money on "Tattoos and let men kiss her on the cheeks so who knows what really happened."

II.

"Sit back, rest your feet and let the video stand for all that you fought for. Bless the Lord and the thirteenth hand of God at Iwo Jima," Diane spat into the tour bus microphone. She was still sitting, her thicker shoulders bobbing against the broken road like high clapping church hands. This was her sixth prayer and I could hear her, again, begin to cry.

Opa pulled two salt licks from his rustic-corduroy pant pockets. He lightly pushed a salt lick into my palm like he used to with oranges in the morning, my fingers then and now barely gripping the object. He loved to push gifts into my palm and tell me that he remembered the day that I was born. The bus was getting quiet and the memorial video was about to begin at its corners. I looked to the right, past his seven white pieces of front-to-back bangs, out the window, saw the bus riding the lane barrier bumps, and looked back up just in

time to see us passing exit 172. We were approaching Baltimore's most infamous, two year award-winning *Golden Corral* buffet restaurant, to end the itinerary. We were ending the itinerary in a place where I could barely hear my Opa over the crowds of family's eating and children in the walkways.

One red bar for signaling across at the Marines raising the flag at Iwo Jima and a black bar for having carried his brother through a field of mines not long after. Still with the salt lick in my palm, getting hungrier as we approached the restaurant, I noticed my Opa's eyes becoming wet. He turned to me but did not speak at first. He turned back to the window and sighed with a tear rolling to his nose, "It's for the deer. There's lots of deer where there's well-curbed grass, short, like around my mother's gravestone. Sometimes the deer come in the morning while my truck is warming up. They remind me of the fuzzy children and your mother's short bangs, like a tail. Men don't like tails you know."

"There aren't deer on the bus," I said, again, since he tried to leave the group at lunch to go look for deer that his mother used to tell him about before her murder in the grass. "Here, use this napkin, wipe your hands. We are going to eat and who knows if their bathrooms will be open. The government shutdown is out of control."

III.

Lewis called from the back for me, again. He looked just like my father and was alone, without any guardian, so I let him call me Starlight without sighing. We figured out at the Vietnam wall that we shared the same birthday. People were taking pictures of us, Opa resting at a nearby bench, and Lewis kissed my cheek a few times for "All the young nurses he had kept."

“It smells like roast beef back here,” Lewis said. “Like those damn bam-bam pilots sitting still in their falling straps, wings coming off. You know they fell, didn’t you?”

“Who fell, Lewis? It’s your roast beef sandwich from lunch, remember? Here, see, it’s under the seat. Oh Lewis, your shoes aren’t here,” I sighed.

“I told them people I didn’t need no fucking shoes Starlight Starbright. You could run your own show with those lashes and tattoos. Be up there in stars with glitter on your palms you could have bombs go off in your honor.”

I walked to the front of the bus in lunging steps to stretch my stiff-seated knees past the eight other sleeping veterans with hearing aids in their palms as the fuzz of the memorial video played with a small, hot bomb going off here and there. I braced myself on a seat and caught one aged nurse saying, “They told me that the Harbor was bombed and I said ‘Shut-up.’” I stopped walking, forgot about Lewis and his bare feet like a Priest before a child descending in water, and found my seat back with Opa.

“Where’d you go? You missed the barking dogs. And Jessie, you have to stop looking for your father in every man that talks to you. Lewis is nuts. Vietnam made him that way. Let it alone, World War II really did a number on him in Nam.”

“There aren’t any dogs, it’s night, we are on a freeway, remember? Those were bombs on the video, see?” I held my hand in a point for about a minute before my wrist tired and Opa was already snug into the window like the gray bushes outside, wrinkled, eyes closed.

The video was at crescendo as Tom Hanks cut the ribbon to the World War II memorial, the zone changed to 70 miles per hour in the deep purple night and the salary bus

driver with Diane and black and white President Baby Bush sang *God Bless America* as I closed my eyes in fear that we again were going to pray. The almost fallout silence of the static after the credits had nothing left, on what I assumed through my closed lids were blue television screens, reminded me of the radio static of a police scanner when Officer Drewson had held me on his lap in the waiting room²⁷ while my mother's veins were being pushed with Benzines of every kind so that she would be more manageable in a small coma; I was waiting for my Opa to arrive and take me, well, I'm not sure where they had arranged for me to go²⁸. I don't remember if the officer spilled coffee or tea on me, he just spilled something on my shoes and so he held me in his lap. I felt his Sheriff star press into my upper arm and woke up later in the backseat of Opa's car, feeling the three consecutive dips in the road that I knew meant we were close to the Sumner cemetery.

Opa took me there every third weekend to cut the grass around his mother's grave since my hands were small and I had volleyball thighs that could easily carry two cans of soda and some licorice for when we took a break under a molding maple. It was molding because many soldiers, Opa said, had cut their names and their dead ones' names into the bottom of it so that they could rest in peace. I wasn't sure then what peace had to do with a dead body, but I went ahead and offered him one of the sodas each time he brought it up because I felt the need to fill some of the silence afterward. He took me there every third weekend because his mother was stabbed to death in his back yard when he was only a small

²⁷ Remember, according to the police report that I had to dig up at my Oma's house but she would not let me use here, I was only seven months old here. But I remember being two or three, I remember the tea (it was Earl Grey) and I remember a Sheriff star pressing into me. I guess that Sheriff Star could have been Paul's over the years, but I feel too strongly that it belongs right here. So, memoir and feeling.

²⁸ Honestly, at this point, everyone uses memory to pull the taffy in a thousand directions.

teen, around the same small teen age that my father died²⁹ and I think that when he watched her boyfriend kill her in daylight, something must have changed. Something must have changed. Something must have changed. Because what would a child do after the boyfriend smiles and walks away? That little boy can turn away, finish his mustard sandwich, and get ready for all of the wars he is going to fight in. The generational determinism of a child and her Opa cutting grass at a cemetery to pass the time before her mother can wake up, is a perfect time to let silence do the job of memory³⁰. Until another soda top is cracked, and we both laugh because laughing if quiet enough, is okay under shady trees at a cemetery. It might even make you seem humble or “okay.”

Opa’s hands were so small that he had to place both side-by-side to cover up her name on her tombstone. He would only press there for a minute, closing his eyes seconds before saying that we had better head back before the sun died. It was never more than noon when we arrived or left. When he took me the morning that officer Drewson held me, we stayed quite a bit longer, even trimming a few other graves: Patterson, Spollack, Tredson...or was it Teason? Opa did not have soda in the trunk as usual and did not bring anything except for a small pair of scissors that looked like children’s scissors, the ones my third grade teacher put in our pencil boxes. He told me when we had settled in, at the top of the main hill, that I’d be staying at his house for a bit while my mother figured some things out with God.

His voice became quiet and sharp when he told me to figure out how to tell God’s truth and then to look into a mirror and say it. The world was not for stories or memories but

²⁹ My mother is in Mexico right now. I looked for the death certificate. Nothing.

³⁰ And yet, here we are.

for exactly what I could say to a mirror. And God was behind every mirror, waiting. “Watch yourself cry in a mirror and then make sure to never do it again. That’s what they taught me in the military before Vietnam. There would be mirrors all around to show others dying and falling and being shot through the neck, but let the mirrors do nothing to you. Look through the sides of your eyes until you are certain you can look straight through anything.”

The turtles under the eight tires of the bus each clacked me awake like the second hand of a rusted clock and I looked to my right to see my Opa’s salt lick sitting on his lap. He was staring at the television’s blue screen, polished sweater bars and medals reflecting back onto my wrists like small, opal bracelet links.

“Opa, aren’t you cold? Where is your jacket?”

He motioned toward his small, loafered feet and said, “It was cold that night my mother was stabbed. The deer the next morning ate all of the flowers off of the hydrangea plant, or maybe it was the birds. There were always birds barking like small kazoos. But God loves birds.”

I could never talk with him about God. God had saved his life when he was trapped under bodies being blunted down with the butts of bayonets.

“Opa, are you sure you’re not cold? It’s almost ten and it’s freezing in here. I’ll go ask Diane to turn down the air.” I grabbed the back of the seat in front of me, bracing myself to pull my knees straight up when he grabbed my wrist and held me there, the opal links on his knuckles.

“The deer stood in the snow, licking at my mother’s hands because she wasn’t dead yet. But she died, there, at the stomach. Your father reminded me of my father, before he stabbed her. They never married you know. They had me but he was too angry to marry her.”

“Before who stabbed who, Opa?” I took his hand in mine, rubbed at his crinkled skin, and held his trigger-shaped index finger and thumb. The family doctor, Dr. Nelsen, tried to have Opa wear a brace for carpal tunnel to prevent further pain but Opa refused, saying, “What’s due is due.”

“Your father tried, you know, he just wasn’t right with daughters.” He shifted in his seat, pulled back his hand and rubbed his left shoulder. “Jesselah, where’s my coat? Stop looking at the window, you know what you look like. It’s cold in here Shutzie, you should go tell them it’s too cold for us old people.”

“I will, I will. Opa, tell me about something good. Tell me about something happy. Oma. Yeah, tell me about Oma. You know, people usually don’t stay married for fifty years now...”

“Well you know, your Oma said that she was stepping on the face of a Jew, but it was mud, Shutzie. She was stepping in mud and I held her hand to jump from the train but she just plopped down in the mud, saying over and over she saw the cheeks. So she took all the children to America. They didn’t like her much. She didn’t speak English. And Liane, oh Liane after the burculosis was a nightmare.”

Opa waved Diane away when she came to make sure he was ready to have dinner. “Ten minutes then,” she said. Diane was not one to push God’s people toward something they didn’t think was right. He leaned back into the vibrating window as the engine cooled

but still purred like a runner catching breath and spoke so softly, I almost missed him completely. I hadn't eaten for the ten memorials we visited and the bumps the whole way over made me feel weak, on the verge of a faint. I wiped the back of my neck and caught his sentences.

"I remember only one time in my life I was more scared of staying alive than dying on a train under a bus full of feet and necks. I can't remember if day ever came because it was so cold and wet and dark outside that the smoke from guns and bombs and fires that filled the air I think clogged up the sun like hair stuck in drain, the dark Asian hair and the lighter Jewish hair. I can remember the crying and all the babies around me who didn't have mothers anymore, or all the babies who stopped crying in the middle of night who froze in the wind. I must have been in my early twenties when I moved from being stationed in Darmstadt back to America. I married a German lady though. You're German."

I cupped my palm around his shoulder, began to cry and told him that there was nothing wrong with remembering the babies. He never did stay in the room when any of his fourteen children began to cry. He never did make it to their deliveries either. He let me cry for a few minutes before saying, "Jesselah, no no."

Lewis moaned from the back and Diane started panicking. It was like watching Opa look at his mother in the backyard, eyes focused but not seeing the momentum. There were car alarms from the overstuffed parking lot going off like a tired deer's heartbeat and Lewis fell limp to the side. Diane prayed, pulled an extra oxygen tank from the overhead storage and Opa shrugged. "He does look just like your father, you know that? Shutzie, don't look."

Opa took two photographs from his wallet, one I recognized because I remember wearing those wool leggings³¹ the day the officer sat me on his lap. The other I had never seen before but wanted to keep. He took them both out, hands shaking in small circles, and apologized for spilling coffee on them so long ago, muttering off the last names of Patterson, Jacobs, and my mother; “A nurse in the waiting room turned into my chest and scrunched the coffees I was taking to the officers guarding your mother’s room. But I couldn’t go on being mad at a nice lady.” The liquid sat in his wallet, draining the color from my leggings onto my shoes. I remember Oma tucking me in during the nights I had to stay with her before she gave me over to the church because I was just too much and she was just too tired, and Sabrina was easier to manage once she was returned. I remember Oma tucking me in and telling me that my mother was having some trouble and that I need not to worry, she would get to the bottom of things. I remember Opa did not tuck me in during those nights, but he did slowly and quietly dress in the morning so that at least we could still be close to each other. We were close to each other. We were silent and close to each other.

The trip had made him tired. His eyes fell to a slump and I again took his hand while he nodded off, asking for a piece of toast from the buffet. “Bring here, Shutzie. And coffee.”

I still cannot tell which war he is talking about, or where he has left his wallet, or what I quit exactly, but he still holds my hands. I knew he was changing as we sat together in

³¹ I would later find out that Sheriffs were going to be a regular thing in my life. So all photographs that had this officer in them are actually representative of me when I was born until age five. This Sheriff, the one who held me at the hospital and was holding my mother’s hand (sexually she says) when she woke from her coma, was my father’s brother.

silence that day, but I still leaned over, kissed his forehead far enough away from his cheeks and whispered, “I don’t think they have toast at dinner but I’ll try.”

The Mother and Father Poem

It is a brushed and stroked story and brushed out
tangles
and it will not come to a town that is near and/or around
her
father left on a whim-nap;
three triangle weeks of pepperjack-cheese grilled
and peas,
overcooked
and for it is not,
for it is not...
(*That kind...*)
Yes, that kind of day where cheese is appealing
to tunic
and daughter-leaving mothers.

It is a pipet of an arm in dislocation to having an elbow
or training
bra role model and small fly-like silk
and petite, dusty air
type of wings and then a pipet
of an arm
over there, too, gather it?
in the peri-periph-ph-pherial of the cardboard
cutout
bedframe below
pulling puppet strings to make the sea
horse
dance to the musical bubbles
of air
she pinhole-lipped blew into his flat face.
Please, father.
Come home with me. Come home with me.
I have lots and lots of dolls.
Come back for me.

Nothing can jump into the swirl long enough
to stay
in motion
with Sephora green walls falling out
in a damper
muddied green
with the night falling in the surfacing shutter
of eyelids,
opening a pistachio size to the smell of pepperjack-chili
and butter smoke
and the clinking of chalk-top perfume bottles
her father was emptying into the kitchen sink

while washing the fuzzy cheese-covered dishes from the week before.

It is entangled in the hallway
hits the floor at odd times
no pattern
no rhythm
just father's face when he got lost
in the mountains and there was only three bottles
of water and three zip-dried meals
or so I hear.



Exact Text Messages from Mom to Me and Me to Mom.

J: What year were you married to Dana/my dad?

K: I believe we were married April of 1986. That's what the math tells me. I personally do not remember.

J: What was your wedding like? Honeymoon?

K: The wedding was incredibly depressing. I have only a few images left³². I was showing quite a lot and I was scared, but it was a numb type of scared. I felt frozen, like I couldn't react, or like one of those dreams where you need to scream but you just can't³³. The wedding took place at Valley View Christian Fellowship³⁴, which I don't believe it was called that back then. Was it actually called the German Church??? I'm not sure. Anyhow, you know how depressing that place feels all on its own. I remember getting dressed in Oma's bedroom, Uncle Henry was there and I think he ordered a limo and went with me there...I'm not sure anymore. I do remember looking in the mirror and thinking I should pack a bag, go to the airport and leave the country. Two things stopped me. I was afraid Dana

³² I had pictures, Paul burned them in the fireplace one night when I turned in his binder full of porn that he had tucked in my mattress. He burned the photographs of my father and the Dell '94 Flash Series porn.

³³ When I was six years old I had the recurring dream of my mother screaming up from a well, but I did not like wells, so I did not go near the well. I just waited five hundred feet from the well until my glow alarm clock woke me up for school. When I was grounded and did not have the alarm clock, I would hear my mom scream for hours longer. I think there was a copper ladder nearby, but it kept melting so I just stayed where I was in the brush; I had white shoes on (always white shoes in dreams) and didn't want the copper to burn through them. Since the reoccurring dream, I have always been fascinated with coal mining and the job of the canary.

³⁴ The cult-like church where I would later receive water therapy and live with my Pastor and his wife until my mom got out of the hospital. Until yesterday, March 3, 2014, I have been told by my Oma that my father assaulted my mother when he was drunk, trying to take me away from her and off into the night with him. I am now informed over the internet thirty minutes before my mother leaves for Mexico, again, that it was my father trying to take Sabrina. I am not sure what I can or cannot feel about the longing for my father that I have been writing about for the past nine years. Longing for an evil person is troublesome enough, but longing for an evil person who did not try to take you when punching your mother in the face until she went down and out is another sort of dystopia. The kind that puts you in a basement bathroom, checking stalls to make sure all of the other girls have left, and punch every single door because they are metal and you don't know what the fuck is going on before you have to go teach college freshman about cohesion strategies on the sentence level.

would hurt Oma and Opa, kill them in their beds or something. The other thing was that all of Oma's friends were there and there was this pressure that I couldn't embarrass her in front of all her friends. She and her friends had made cakes and food and I can't remember her actually saying anything to me like that but it was there, the knowing. Dana was drunk and you could smell it a mile away. So was his dad. In retrospect, I'm a little disgusted that no one stood up to say something, call it off. I mean, they don't even let you get tattooed in that condition. His mom was also there. I had one friend there, Corinne. She was my witness. The rest of the guests were all Oma's friends. Herb, Robyn³⁵, I don't remember other siblings, but maybe others were there. The honeymoon was a night at the ocean, *The Grey Seagull*, Ocean Shores. It was pretty sad. We drove there, Dana drunk, and he went in the room and passed out on the bed until morning. I cried off and on through the night until I fell asleep. We didn't have any food or drink. I woke up so thirsty. I was 3+ months pregnant. That's all I remember about that.

J: What is one memory you have that's important?

K: On one of my birthdays Dana took me to the Space Needle for dinner. I believe his mom gave him the money to do so. He was eating a couple orders of oysters and drinking heavily. He was flirting with the waitress, which he always did, and becoming somewhat belligerent. The drive home to Puyallup was Dana telling me how he was the Green River Killer, how he did the killings, where the bodies are buried, how many woman³⁶, etc. etc. We were driving in the dark, I was looking out the window on my side looking to the

³⁵ Robyn ran away from my Oma and Opa when she was 17 years old and only returned when she needed money here and there. Robyn's daughter Alex, made me stuff my pants with socks and pretend that I was a boy. I haven't seen Alex in over ten years, but she has two children now.

³⁶ I had a dream when I was nine that my father killed fourteen women and asked me to send their families letters before he shot himself and I woke up.

moon wishing as hard as I could that the heavens would please just take me through the window. I fantasized about that many times actually, I would press up so hard against the door looking up. Another memory is when we were sitting in our living room, watching tv and Dana turned to me rather normally and told me he was going to kill me and proceeded to tell me how. It wouldn't be painless and merciful, he was going to tie me to the wall and every day he was going to drill bolts and nails into my joints, bones, eyes. He told me this as if we were talking about something we were watching on tv, very calmly. I remember using a disposable razor when I was pregnant with Sabrina, a few months after I was married, cutting my wrists. Of course it was only surface bleeding, not anything deep enough to do harm, but I bled and had small surface scars. I had so many one morning that I was bleeding quite a lot and put gauze and tape around my wrists. I had a long sleeve shirt on and Oma saw this and mocked me by saying I was trying to get attention and that if I really was going to do something I should do it.

J: When did the attack happen and how did it happen?

K: You were 7 months old³⁷ so the assault happened in May sometime maybe June 1988. I have the papers somewhere. I woke up around 2:00-3:00 am to some noise and walked out of my bedroom to see Dana carrying Sabrina down the hall. I followed asking him what he was doing. He said he was taking her far away and I would never see her again. I placed myself in front of the door to the garage and told him he wasn't taking her anywhere, especially since he was drunk. He punched me in the face while holding her, knocking me out, and took her. When I came to I called the police.

J: How long were you hospitalized? What happened during this time?

³⁷ May.

K: I was in the hospital for about a week. I had a few surgeries and the first few days are a blur other than waking up after a surgery to find Dana's brother, Michael, sitting in his police uniform holding my hand. Creepy. There was a commotion and Michael left because Dana arrived with Sabrina. He had been arrested the night or morning of the assault and booked. He had gone to his parents' house which is where Sabrina was while I was being looked after by the police and paramedics before they transported me to the hospital. Dana's dad put up bail to get him out of jail and he came, with Sabrina in his arms to my hospital room. Herb arrived minutes later and he and Dana hugged . . . awkward. The nurse, whom I still remember and could pick her out of a crowd,³⁸ found out who he was and kicked him out of my room. She was so pissed off and couldn't understand what was going on. My brother Christian and his then wife, Julie, came to see me. Christian was pacing and saying how he was going to kill Dana and I felt bad because Christian beat Julie, she has a permanent limp. My cousin Elizabeth came to see me. I had been there several days by then and she took me to take a shower down the hall. I had my face bandaged and I was standing there in the shower naked and she was washing me telling me I had really let my body go and that I needed to do exercises. Oma and Opa were finally reached, they were traveling in Europe and were in Hungary³⁹ at the time and were making arrangements to get a flight home. My sister Robin⁴⁰ checked me out of the hospital after 5-6 days and we got rear ended about a mile away from the hospital. The police made us go back to see if I was okay. After going back to the hospital Robin took me home. You were with Robin⁴¹ the first couple of days I

³⁸ This is the detail you remember?

³⁹ Visiting Oma's family. She is Hungarian. She will never say she is anything but German.

⁴⁰ Did the spelling of your sibling's name just change?

⁴¹ This is the first I've ever heard of this. I was told by Oma that I lived with the Pastor and his wife for a year.

was in the hospital. She and Mark and Alex lived in the same neighborhood and were called when the police were assessing and calling the ambulance. You stayed with Robin for a few days and then you stayed with Pastor Juergen until Oma and Opa arrived home again, about a week or so. Dana's brother made arrangements with the courts to have Sabrina returned to me. Robin took her and that's where she stayed until Oma and Opa returned. About a week after I'd been home again and Oma and Opa had returned, Elizabeth made an arrangement with Dana to meet and talk about what happened. To this day I believe she and Oma had this planned because they didn't believe what I said happened. Elizabeth grilled me after she met with him because she didn't believe me⁴². I do not have any support from these people.

J: Where was Sabrina? Age?

K: Sabrina was almost 2⁴³. I think the above may answer?

J: Where was I? Age?

K: You were 7 months old and I think where is answered above?

J: What age was I when Dad died? Funeral?

K: I do not remember the year Dana killed himself. I remember the phone call and that you and Sabrina were sitting at the dining room table when I got the call⁴⁴. Roman may have been about 1 by then....I think Dana died just before turning 40, we married when I was 21, so 1985. He was quite older than I was, maybe 11 years? Maybe it was late 1992⁴⁵, early 1993 when he died? I would have to look for his death certificate.

J: When did you remarry?

⁴² She always called me fat. She worked on the Ninja Turtles movies doing the makeup, but I have always felt she is rotten.

⁴³ If I was 7 months, Sabrina would have been 20 months.

⁴⁴ We were outside playing in the back. I saw you faint through the window.

⁴⁵ Roman was born November 8th, 1994. He is my brother. He is not here. He is protected.

K: I don't know. We met at the gym and then outside of Shenanigans, he said if I did not marry him he would kill me.

J: What age was I when Paul was said to be demonstrating grooming techniques or incest motives?

K: You and Sabrina were interviewed to discover what was going on and it was when I filed for divorce the second time...I think you were in 5th⁴⁶ grade? Roman was around 6, that makes you at the time 13? I'm sorry, these details are difficult for me. Perhaps a little older because we had been away from him for 3⁴⁷ years and I was at MAC....I think Sabrina was in 8th⁴⁸ grade during the middle of this? I'm confused. I don't know where all that paperwork is. Oma⁴⁹ probably knows actually.

J: 2 significant memories or events that defined your married life?

K: On our honeymoon we were in Maui. I was swimming in the outdoor pool and Paul was sitting in a chair watching me. A guy jumped in the pool and was swimming. When he swam by me he said hello. When he left Paul came in the pool and started to act like he was playing in the pool and he held me under water until I was choking. (Don't betray him)⁵⁰

I had been sleeping on the couch for quite a long time and one morning he slapped me so hard across the face when I was asleep and acted like nothing happened. (He can get to me at any time. I'm not safe anywhere.)

There are so many but those are the two that first came to mind.

J: What was Sabrina like as a child? I don't remember her at all.

⁴⁶ 7th grade. It was 7th grade.

⁴⁷ No we had not.

⁴⁸ That actually is correct. I am only a year younger than her.

⁴⁹ And hence, the memoir...

⁵⁰ Are these notes for me or for you?

K: Sabrina was pretty happy. She was always smiling and laughing. She was obsessed with her feet. She wasn't very loud when she was super little but she did laugh a lot. It's like she came into life knowing a lot but at the same time had a lot of wonder. Do you not want to know what you were like as a child?

Ashes to Ashes

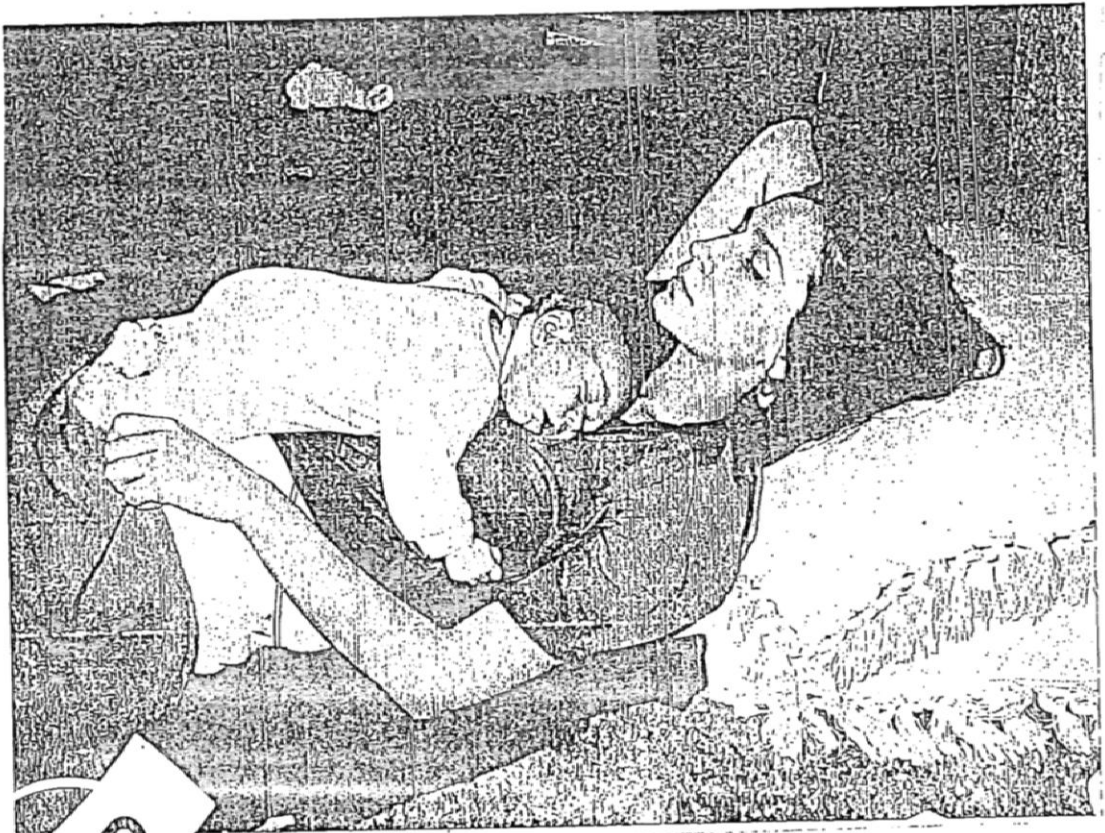
When mother took my hand
in the way she pulps a lemon
in one squeeze and turned
me in through the morgue
doorway lit by red neon
that I remember split
across my face not in a blinding
way but in a way that said
you are here to see your dead,
I thought of myself
as the new owner
and then I thought
of my how my mother
would need me to lead
and to long for her
as my tribe
so that to be dominated
means I have no choices
she will joke in the car
where jokes fall like the ashes
we just committed his bloodshot
body to, as ashes in fact
do not collect in squares
but rather they collect
over time
in unasserted verbs.

I Think Perhaps Your Ashes Were Buried

Sitting in ashes is the closet
of ashes in the closet
of ashes is the closest
moment of ashes
to ashes
to sitting
and looking
around the hanging
string from the light
and reach
out, a hand up,
I wave
to the shadow in the corner
of the closet
and think I've got to get
these ashes
to my mother
before she can hear
(me holding)
them in small dust
blows off my palm.

The Mother Poemⁱⁱⁱ

“She needs to sign the DNR paper when she surfaces^{iv}.” Skin pulled up. “Bone punched three inches above septum.” Remove bone dust. “Her husband is in the waiting room, get the officer.” Set metal. “Mr. Crockett you are not allowed to touch your wife.” Drape skin. “Mr. Crockett I think you should leave now. I’ll have to call the court if you try and get closer to your wife. I’m sure the court will contact you.” Suture.



Epilogue

And dreams bleed through the seams
of bombs and escape through the structure
of ruined red scarves and then marrow
into the small corner of triangle my pillow
top is wedged into and meets the wood
on a slant that longs to feel the cooling balls
of my printed toes for my oval body to roll
its balance across dough
to measure the density of the shadows
and way my body weighs even
(*I insist*)
onto licorice waxed floor
space filled less lonely on the corner
of abandoned helium balloons^v
blowing up and teeth that define the body
like to wake up and be dead
and walk to the bathroom and still
to be dead juggling the unhooked chain
of the handle and in a dead way lift.

ⁱⁱLyrics from Neil Diamond's infamous song, *Sweet Caroline*.

ⁱⁱ A 1950's female hygiene and responsibilities magazine.

iii Root World

When I was six, my mother buried me for eight days in a papaya cavity and buried me next to the squash rows.

Once inside the papaya, I get scared. The pulp sloshes me around and I don't like it. Step after step I fall and my trousers are soiled with what only feels like a used tissue. Should she ever come and find me, I will be spread in a star so that I might still look beautiful. Should she ever come and look for me, I'll have washed my face ten times over with what water I can squeeze from the walls. Should she ever come and call for me, I will sing in alto about the glittered ferrets above her abalone firewall, how they twinkle and smell like candy arms. Should she ever come and eavesdrop for me, I will tell her, "mother, there is no time for holding a honey-glazed Conch to your ear. Hold this photograph of me instead. Look at me here. Look at my bows. Remember me, like this. Humanize me. Humanize me."

Once inside the papaya's last edge, I get more scared, more turned. "Do you still have that photograph of your papa on the ledge in your fire room? I think people might miss how loyal you are to loving because of all the lies you tell. Look at me like you do your papa." It's a tricky sort of thing, speaking from the end of a papaya, but I'll do my best to turn in and in and in until the guts gently arrest me. Because the twinkles and the stars are all burned out now. There's nothing but shade and occlusion here and it feels like home, where the summers I trust you know, are unbearable. You can tell when the day turns in the summer because like a switch it is on and then just off. Just like that. Off. *Do you know about that?* When the tree limbs gain shade and become a compass on your front lawn? The shade around here is no problem. That's when she walks best, when north looks thick and solid on that lawn. If I press close enough to the roof I can hear her light feet.

Once inside the papaya's last exhale, I can smell the gasses of a sigh and how sorry the papaya is. I think about the heatwave three stratas up. I think about her hands looking like white flags, surrendering to something I will not know until I am eight. And the gasses from the cooling sun. I think about the gasses from the cooling sun, how they come up from the ground like souls swimming out and to the side of their graves. She tells me often, that Greeks entered into death backward, their past already behind them. Perhaps the leaves gently rising and turning and landing is just another way to rumble me down in the pulp. Perhaps the leaves rising in the still swoosh of heat at dusk is just another way to rattle me all the way down in the guts, with her voice, trailing, "mothers don't remember the children they don't need."

Should she ever come and eavesdrop for me, I will tell her, "mother, there is no time for holding a honey-glazed Conch to your ear. Hold this photograph of me instead. Look at me here. Look at my bows. Remember me, like this. Humanize me. Humanize me."

Write here: _____. Right here, breathe into the pinhole and let your eyes slowly cross. Forget you are under the leitmotif's boards, this is your chance. Breathe. Into the pinhole so historical empathy feels your heat and turns her neck, slowly, listen, you will want her slowly. Listen, you should write here. Go back to your poet's childhood and look through the apparitions, she's in there. Do not choose the leitmotif, she will look like your mother but the gold around her neck does not grow. Look for the gold, is it there? Listen, this is how it has to start. You will need to start breathing shallow now.

Write here: _____. Right here, breathe into the pinhole and let your lips sink slowly close. Push. Into the pinhole so the longing for your tribe gently arrests her. You have the right to begin the story once it's inside you and be responsible for your emotions, she'll say. To be dominated means you have no choices, she'll say. Breathe. Go back to your party hat childhood and look through the apparitions, she's in there. Do not choose her, rather, tell her with your eyes closed that grief does not sit beside you.

Write here: _____. Right here, breathe into the pinhole and let your eyelashes break off like starfish legs, one by silent one, the lesser cruel but in any case, a shallow. Blow. Into the pinhole so the smell of her age seems flat. Go back to your plastic ant farm childhood and shake the old and porous dried bodies out, the ones you illegally took from the baseball mound and hit the bottom a few times. Tell the purple-brown things as they fall that the honeymoon is over. Do not choose the leitmotif as she plays the harp with only a fist, the gold around her wrist does not grow. Calibrate her body in the corner, is she there? Does she still sit on the stool with a leg much longer than the other, pointing down and off the wood? Does she still sit on the stool in a dumbfound twist, her back and legs at you but her eyes in a turn off and away like the shell of a pulped lemon? The bowls, do you see them? Look to the floor. Breathe. The bowls, are they filled with watercolors? Is there a blue? Does she paint her knees from left to right like your mother? Listen, she is going to bury you, you will need to decide.

Write:

The knees, are they painted?

Listen, there will be mothers on piles of mothers, sometimes they sit in one another if hollow enough. Look back to your childhood closet, the apparitions who hang from the closet, she's in there. You may want to ask her to come back now.

^{vvv} The Mother Poem

My mother held a kitten for as many photographs as she could until she came home from a day at the ocean and her mother had let another person from beehive-noon-tea take the kitten home to their daughter. Or perhaps it was just for their own nighttime-news-lap, the daughter could have been a son or something. “You weren’t here now were you? Well? It tore my shloppa, look, a run all the way up to the knee.”

The Father Poem

My father held a bottle in as many photographs as was necessary. “Men drink. Men drink and then they drink some more. Did I tell you about my first drink? Your mother would say you’re too small for that but if I don’t tell yah love-bug, who tells you about a man?”

The Mother Poem

My mother held me for seven minutes before she relapsed into her coma. Perhaps a nurse noticed and took me up in her arms, or perhaps the nurse was a male and took me up like a football.

The Father Poem

“Love-bug. Come here. Dammit, come here. Love-bug come here. Fuck, I love you. Just come and open your gift. Dammit, come here.”

The Mother Poem

“Sweat-Pea, come here. You know Oma loves you. Opa loves your sweet blue eyes. You’re going to be staying here. Your mother has gotten herself into it, again, as usual. We are going to the ocean. The starfish in the morning, they roll up like buns, remember? We are going to the ocean, go wash your face for bed. Don’t think about it, you need to be asleep in ten. If you’re not asleep we don’t go. We don’t go, no skin off my back.”

The Father Poem

“Did your mother tell you how long you have with me?”

The Mother Poem

“She needs to sign the DNR paper when she surfaces.” Skin pulled up. “Bone punched three inches above septum.” Remove bone dust. “Her husband is in the waiting room, get the officer.” Set metal. “Mr. Crockett you are not allowed to touch your wife.” Drape skin. “Mr. Crockett I think you should leave now. I’ll have to call the court if you try and get closer to your wife. I’m sure the court will contact you.” Suture.

The Father Poem

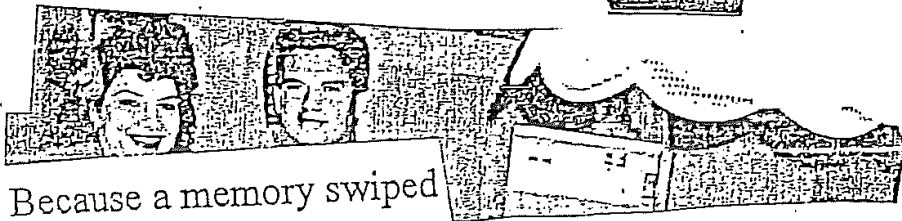
“With all fucking due respect, mam, I’m asking my fucking daughter. There’s no reason you should be here. She’s my fucking daughter.”

The Mother Poem

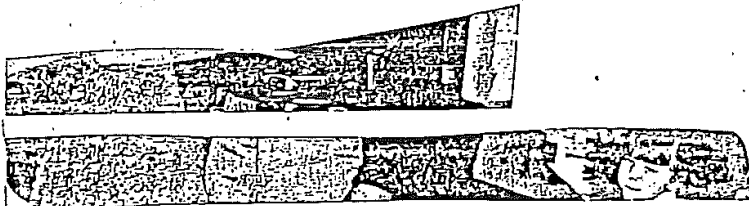
My mother held a cane for as many photographs as were taken when she came home from a year at the hospital and her mother had let another person from beehive-noon-tea take the guestroom. Or perhaps it was because she was upset that I spilled a bowl of wet and sliced cherries on the carpet. “You weren’t here now were you? Well? I tore my shloppa, look, a run all the way up to the knee.”

The dancer on horseback listens to the four

■■■■ a call in response to its call ■■■■



Because a memory swiped



There is no original whiteness

Until the eye refreshes itself ■■■■

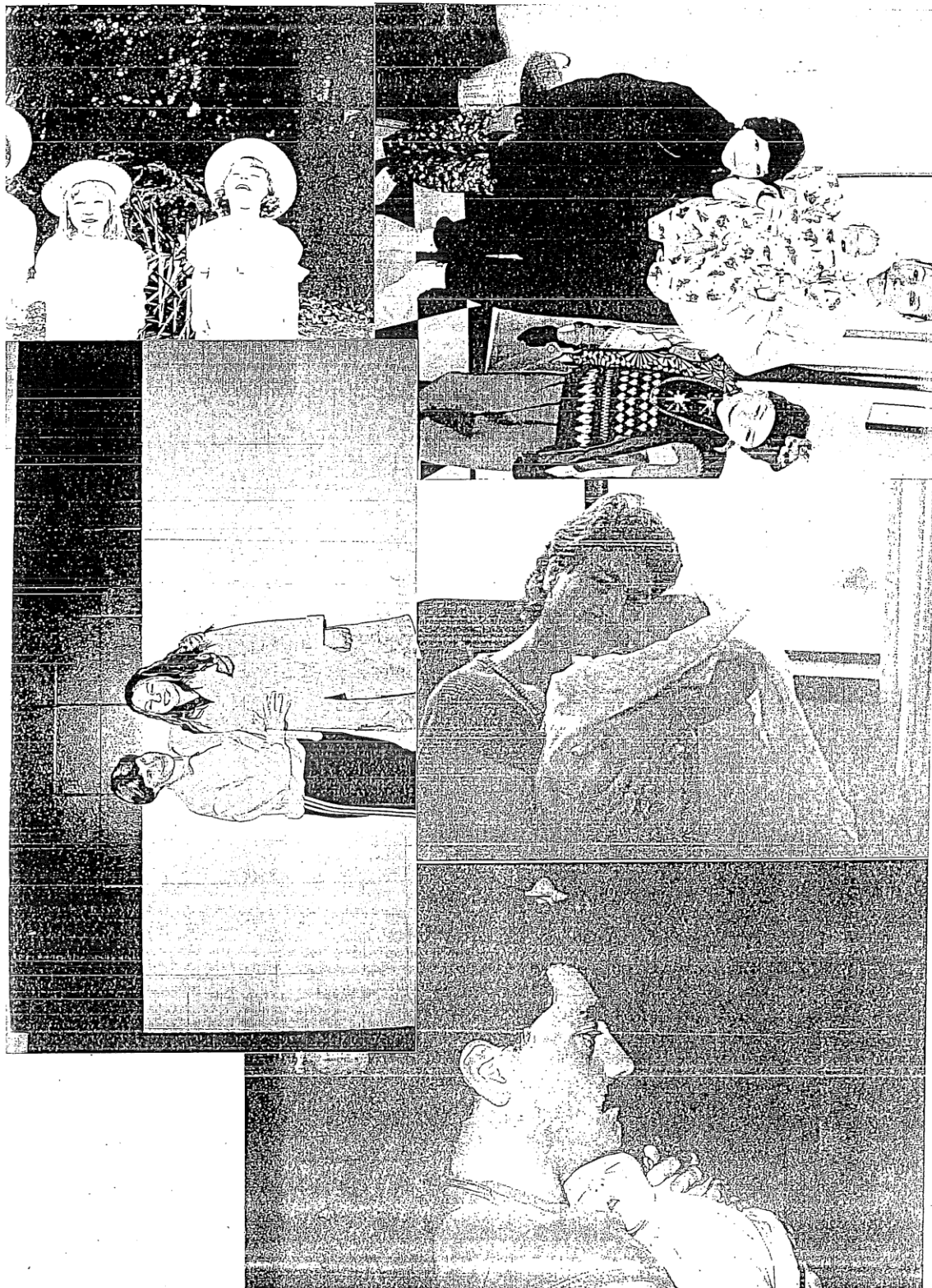
To ■■■■ impermanent yellows of what ifs.



■■■■ pink seems to lean on everything

■■■■ or huddled there together on the beach

Descend into your stationary car ■■■■



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